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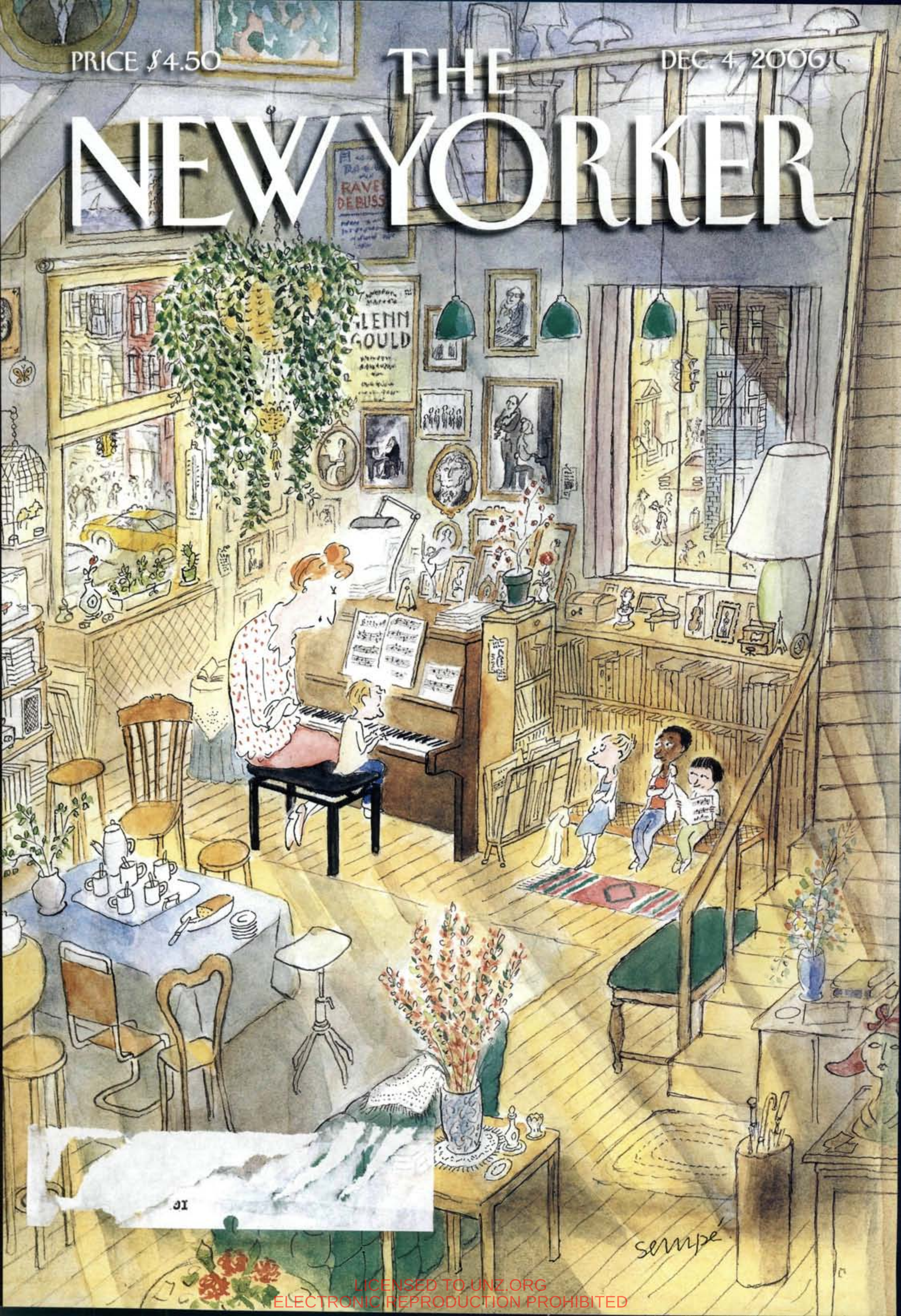
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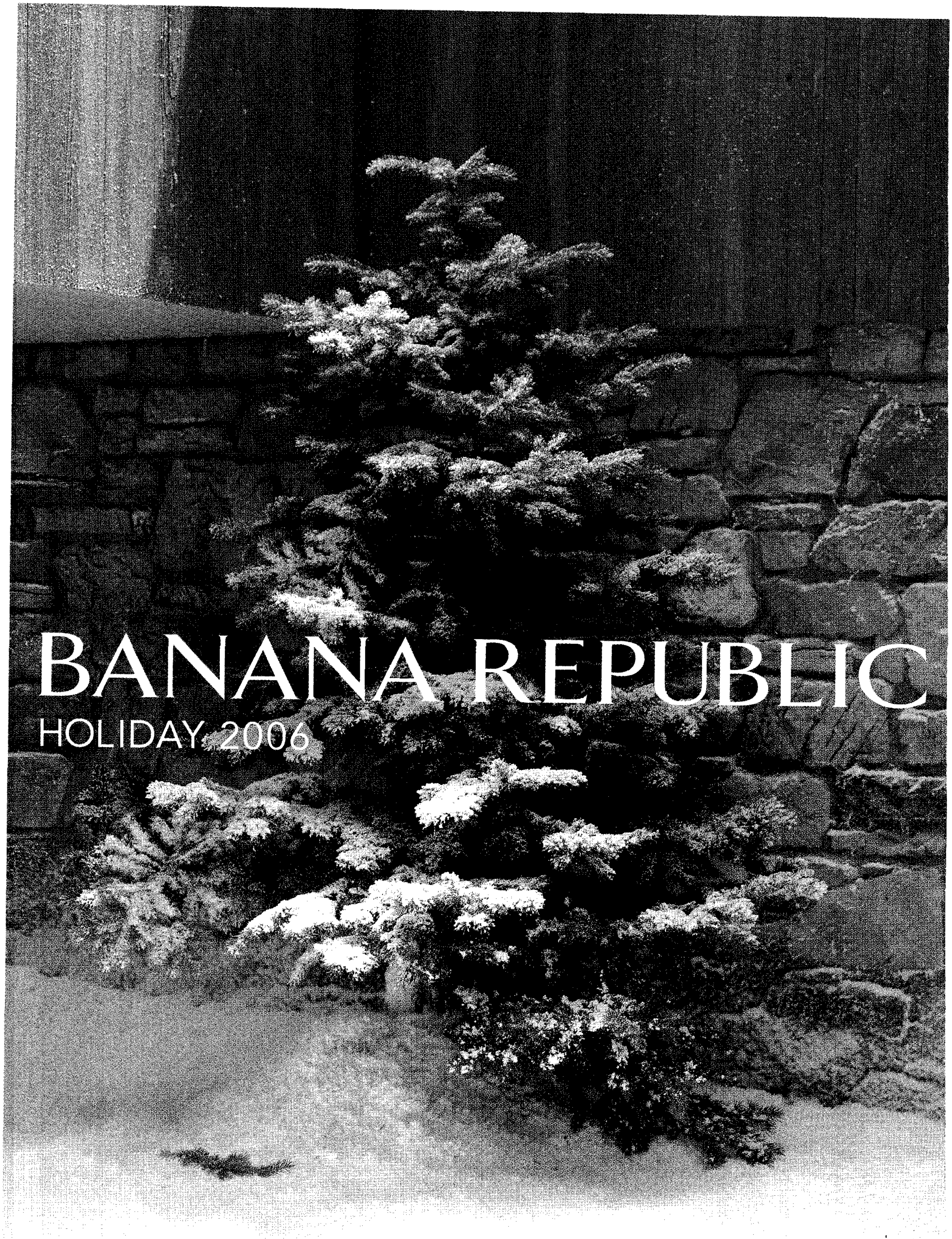

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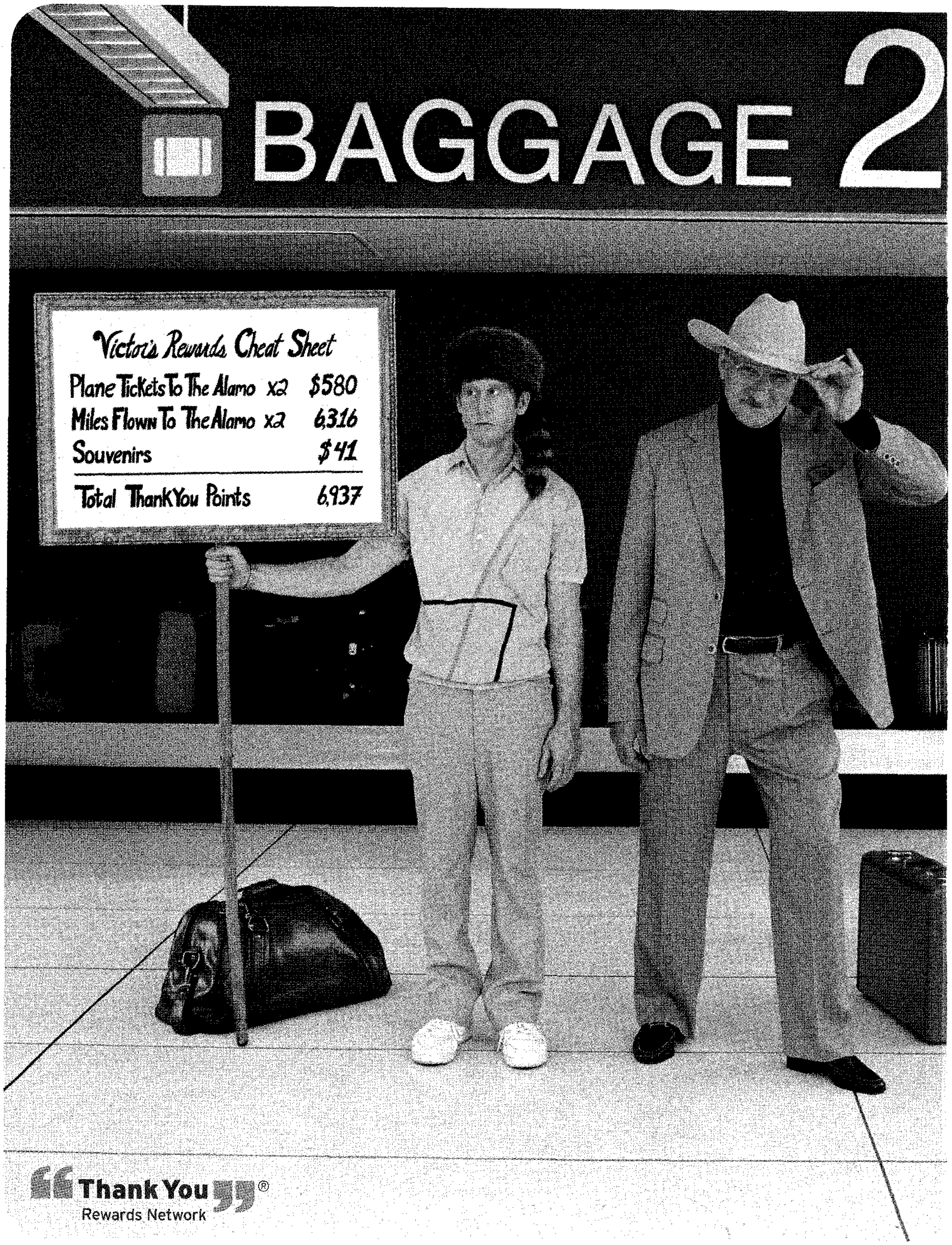
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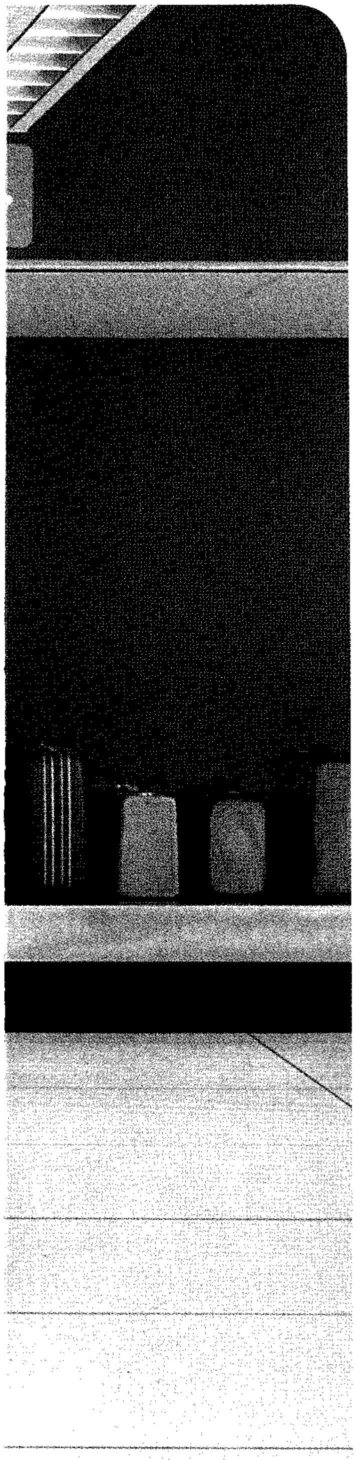

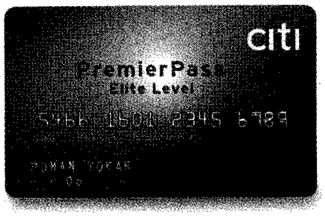

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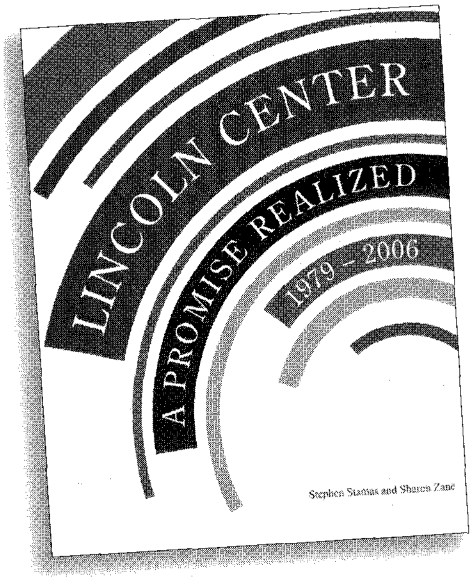

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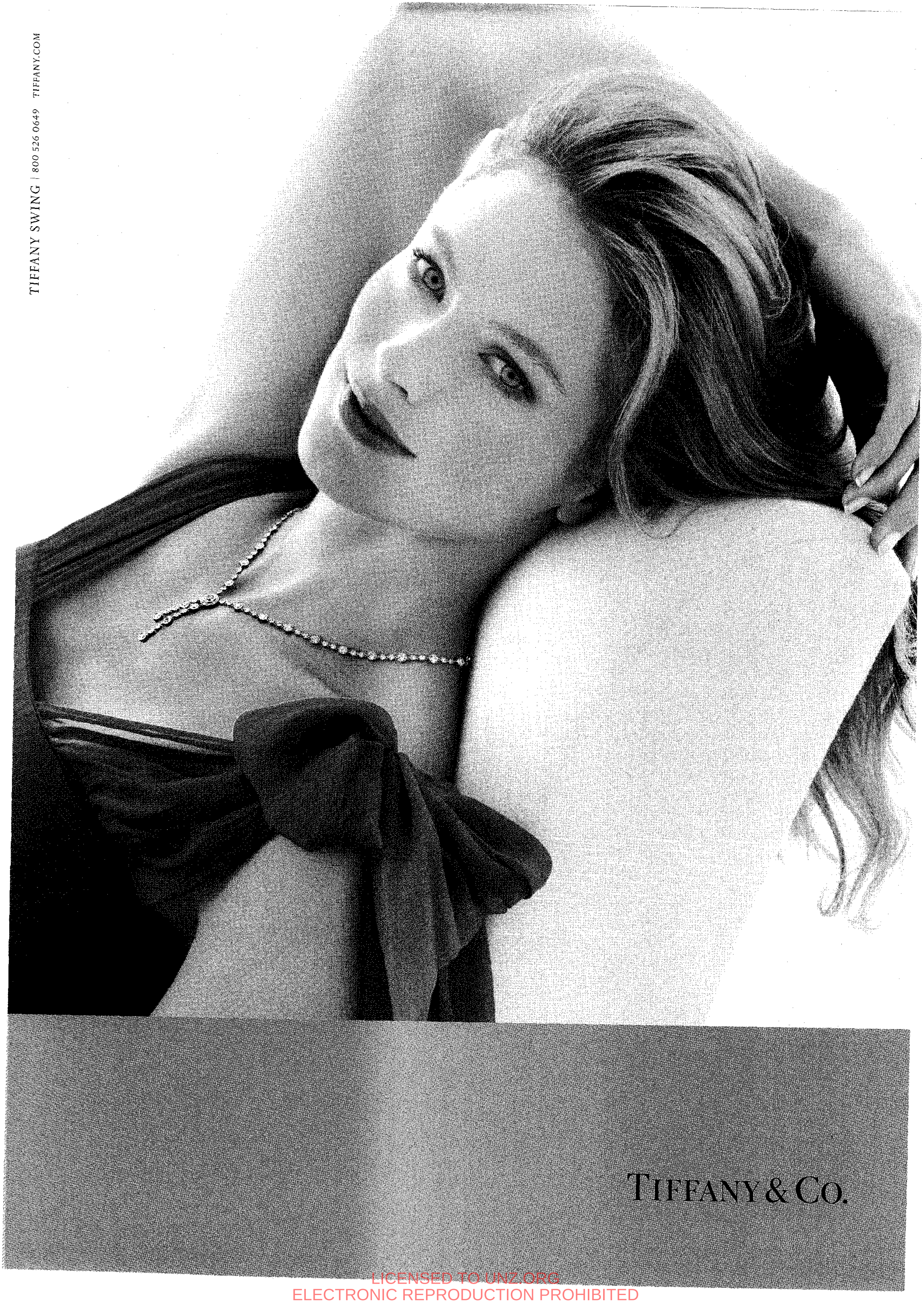
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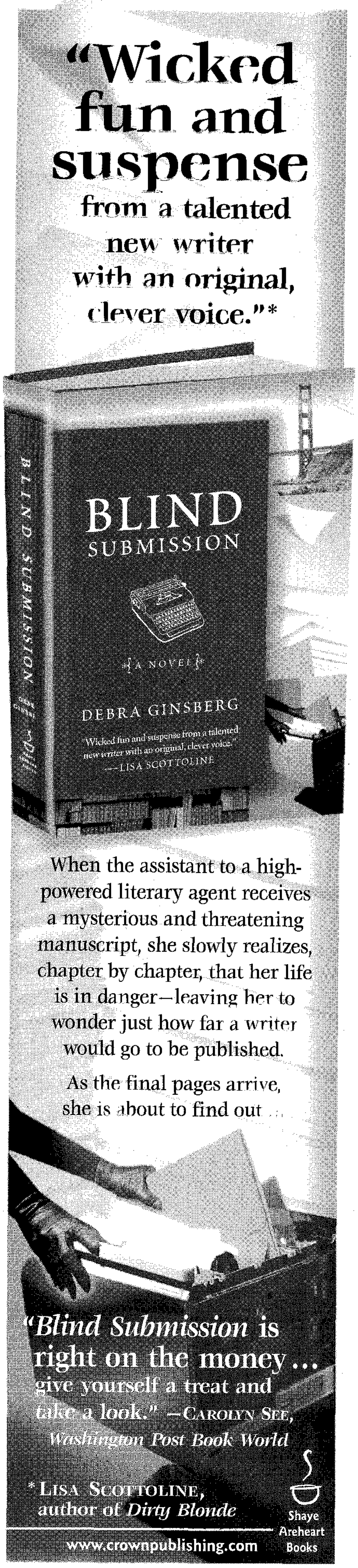
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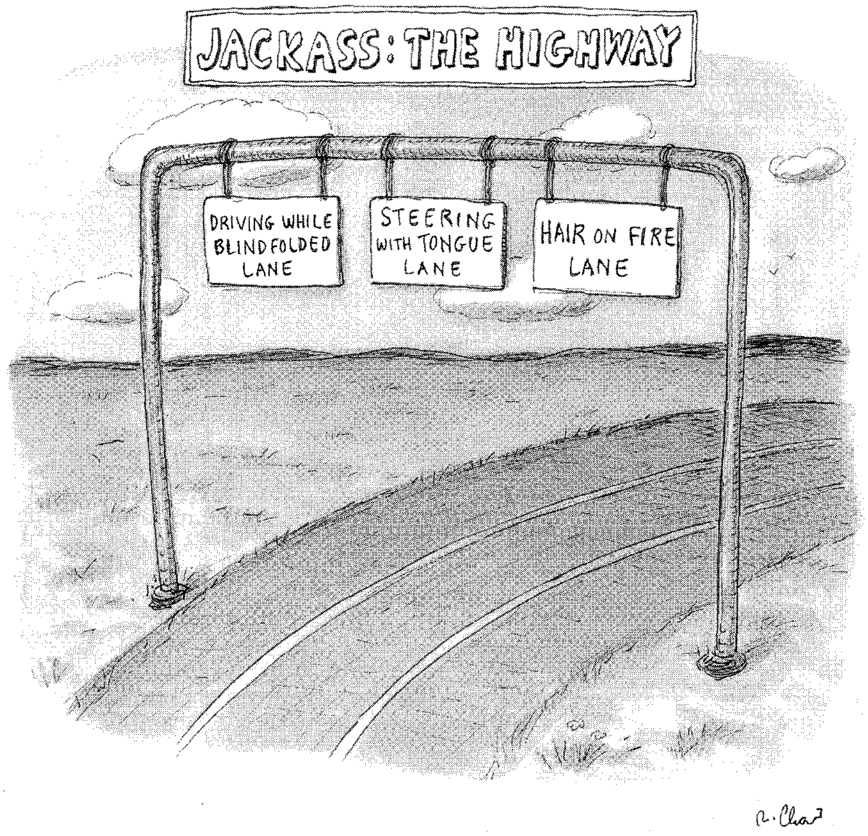
Sergei Esenin (Poem, p. 87) committed suicide in Leningrad in 1925, at the age of thirty. His work is included in "The Stray Dog Cabaret: A Book of Russian Poems," which comes out this month.

Elizabeth Kolbert (A Critic at Large, p. 90) is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change."

David Means (Fiction, p. 84) has published three books. His story collection "Assorted Fire Events" was reissued in paperback last month. ♦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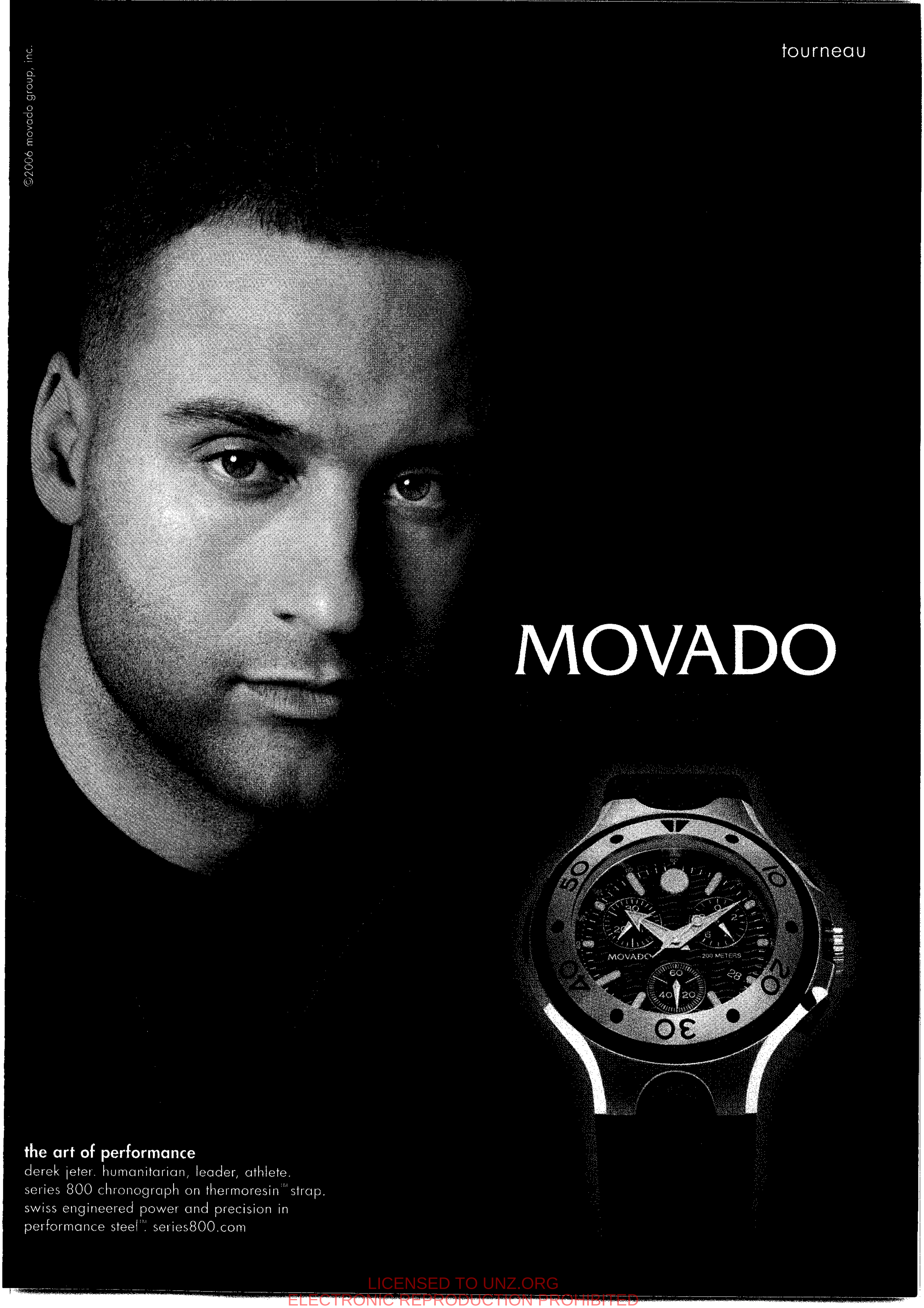

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ON THE SOFT PATH

Michael Specter shows that a "soft path" to water security is more likely to resolve the world's water crisis than the "hard path" of large dams that centralize water storage and political power ("The Last Drop," October 23rd). As Specter notes, India's gigantic Bhakra Dam, hailed as "the new temple of resurgent India" by Prime Minister Nehru in the nineteen-sixties, is still promoted as a success by people who argue that large dams are needed to feed the world's growing population. Yet Indian researchers have demonstrated that reservoir water has been unreliable, and that, even in the Bhakra region, the increase in food production has been based primarily on groundwater mining. The 2006 Human Development Report on water presents an alternative to large dams. It estimates that, with an initial investment of seven billion dollars, extending small check dams across India's rain-fed farming areas could raise the value of the country's monsoon crop from thirty-six billion dollars a year to a hundred and eighty billion. Such an approach would not only protect rivers and the groundwater table; it would also create jobs and give the poor the means to buy the food they produce.

Peter Bosshard
International Rivers Network
Berkeley, Calif.

ENDING AN OUTBREAK

Steven Johnson's history of John Snow's role in the London cholera epidemic of 1854, reviewed by Steven Shapin, relates that the removal of the handle of the Broad Street pump, at Snow's suggestion, essentially ended the Soho outbreak (Books, November 6th). Yet the data in Snow's "On the Mode of Communication of Cholera" reveal that the epidemic peaked on September 1st, and that by the time the pump handle was removed, on September 8th, the outbreak had largely waned; a plot of the cholera mortality data shows no discernible effect. Snow was correct in his assumption that the disorder was waterborne, but he did not claim that the epidemic ended because the pump handle had been removed. In fact, he stated that the flight of the population soon after the onset of the outbreak played a major role in the epidemic's later decline.

N. David Charkes, M.D.
Research Professor Emeritus of Nuclear Medicine, Temple University Hospital
Philadelphia, Pa.

TURKEY AND THE WEST

Elizabeth Kolbert, in her review of Taner Akcam's book on the Armenian genocide, brings up the question of intergenerational political responsibility (Books, November 6th). The widely held belief that Turkey is not at peace with its past is certainly correct today, but the reason for this restlessness is not its republican heritage. The republic was itself an active engagement with the past: Mustafa Kemal and his associates were Western-minded, secular, modernizing, and nationalist élites who realized that the Ottoman regime was bankrupt in practical as well as moral terms. The bigger trouble lies in the inability of present-day Turks to face honestly what happened in 1915. The Turkish public seems to perceive efforts to raise consciousness about the genocide as a political gambit rather than an objective truth. The increasingly nationalist and intolerant tenor of public life appears to have its roots less in the republican tradition than in Turkey's precarious position in its relations with a powerful West today, and Turkey's pathological relationship with its past should be analyzed with reference to these current political and cultural debates.

Onur Bakiner
New Haven, Conn.

•

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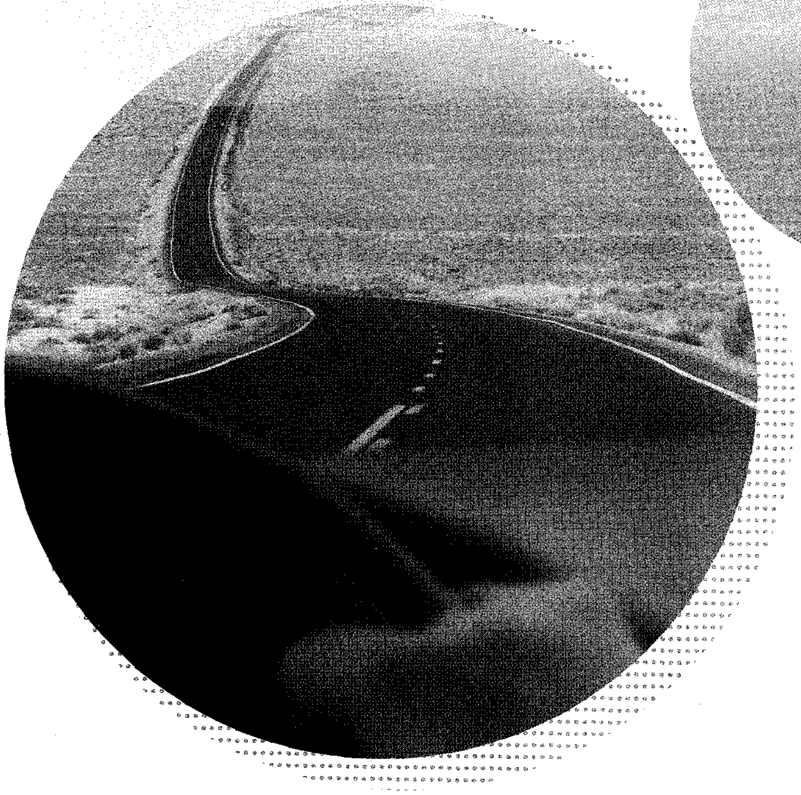

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
PROM NIGHT

Theatre Couture presents a stage adaptation of Stephen King's novel "Carrie," in which a telekinetic outsider ruins the prom for everyone. The comedic gorefest, at P.S. 122, stars the drag actor Sherry Vine; Basil Twist provides the visual effects. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
WILLING SPIRITS

The "Red Hot + RIOT LIVE!" benefit show at the Brooklyn Academy of Music gives Amadou & Mariam, Cheikh Lô, Dead Prez, Yerba Buena, Meshell Ndegéocello, and other musicians a chance to interpret the vast back catalogue of the late Afro-beat pioneer Fela Kuti. The two-night run starts on World AIDS Day. (See page 16.)

ART
HOME-TOWN HERO

Saul Steinberg (1914-1999), whose work appeared in this magazine for six decades, was one of New York's great observers, with a brilliant eye for the style and bustle of the city. Three shows opening this week honor his work: a major retrospective at the Morgan Library, a city-focussed study at the Museum of the City of New York, and a collection of works on paper at the Adam Baumgold gallery. (See pages 22 and 23.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SOUTHERN LIGHT

The Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez, whose thrilling and vibrant voice has endeared him to Rossini lovers, follows his run as Count Almaviva at the Met with his Carnegie Hall début, a solo recital in which he will offer arias and songs by Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, and Fauré. (See page 28.)

MOVIES
DONKEY BUSINESS

The title character of Robert Bresson's "Au Hasard Balthazar," from 1966, may be a donkey; still, his story is one of the cinema's greatest depictions of sainthood. BAM will screen Bresson's film to honor the publication of "The *Village Voice* Film Guide"; the book's editor, Dennis Lim, will moderate a panel with the critics Jonas Mekas, J. Hoberman, and Andrew Sarris. (See page 31.)

Simon Doonan's holiday windows at Barneys. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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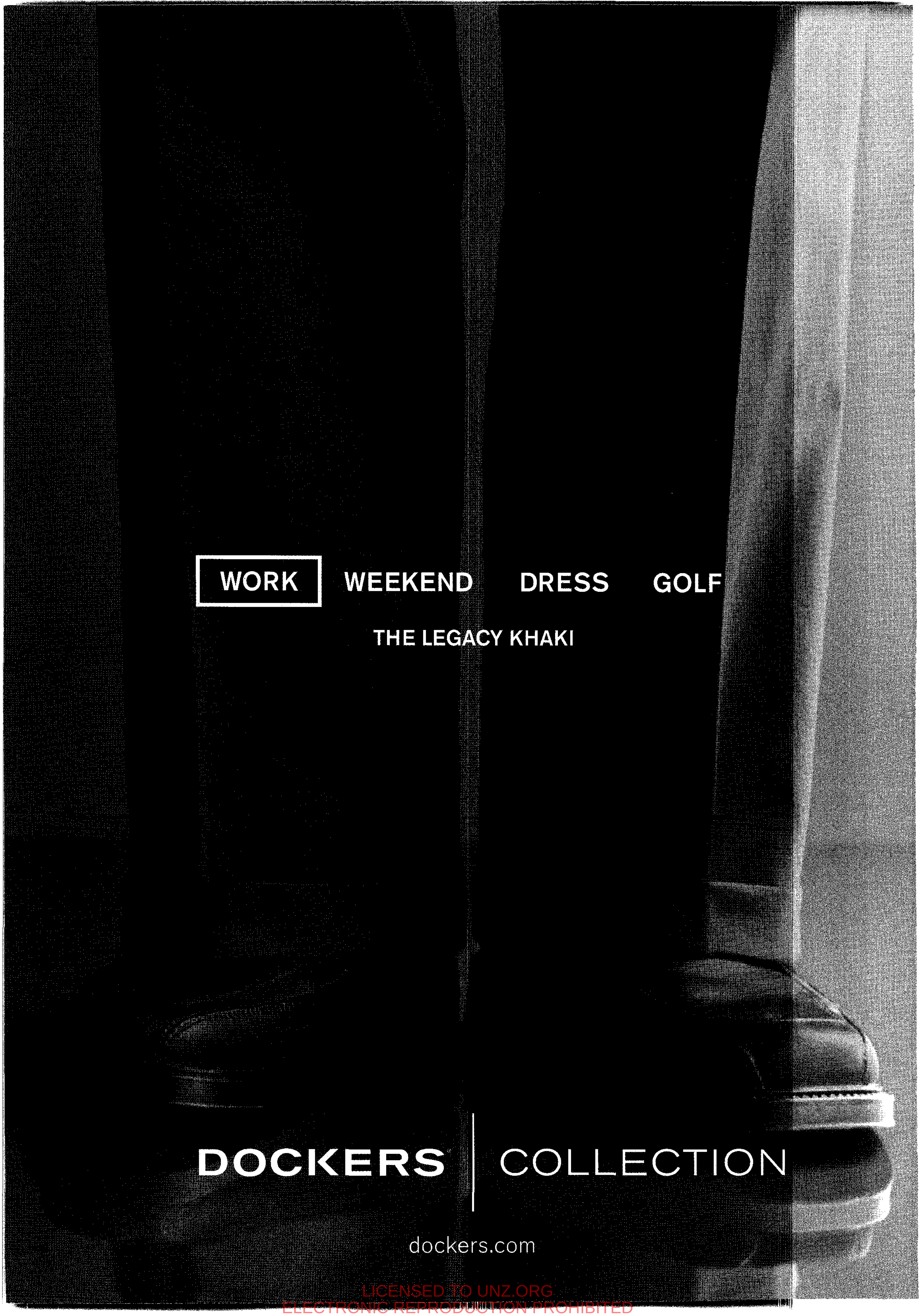

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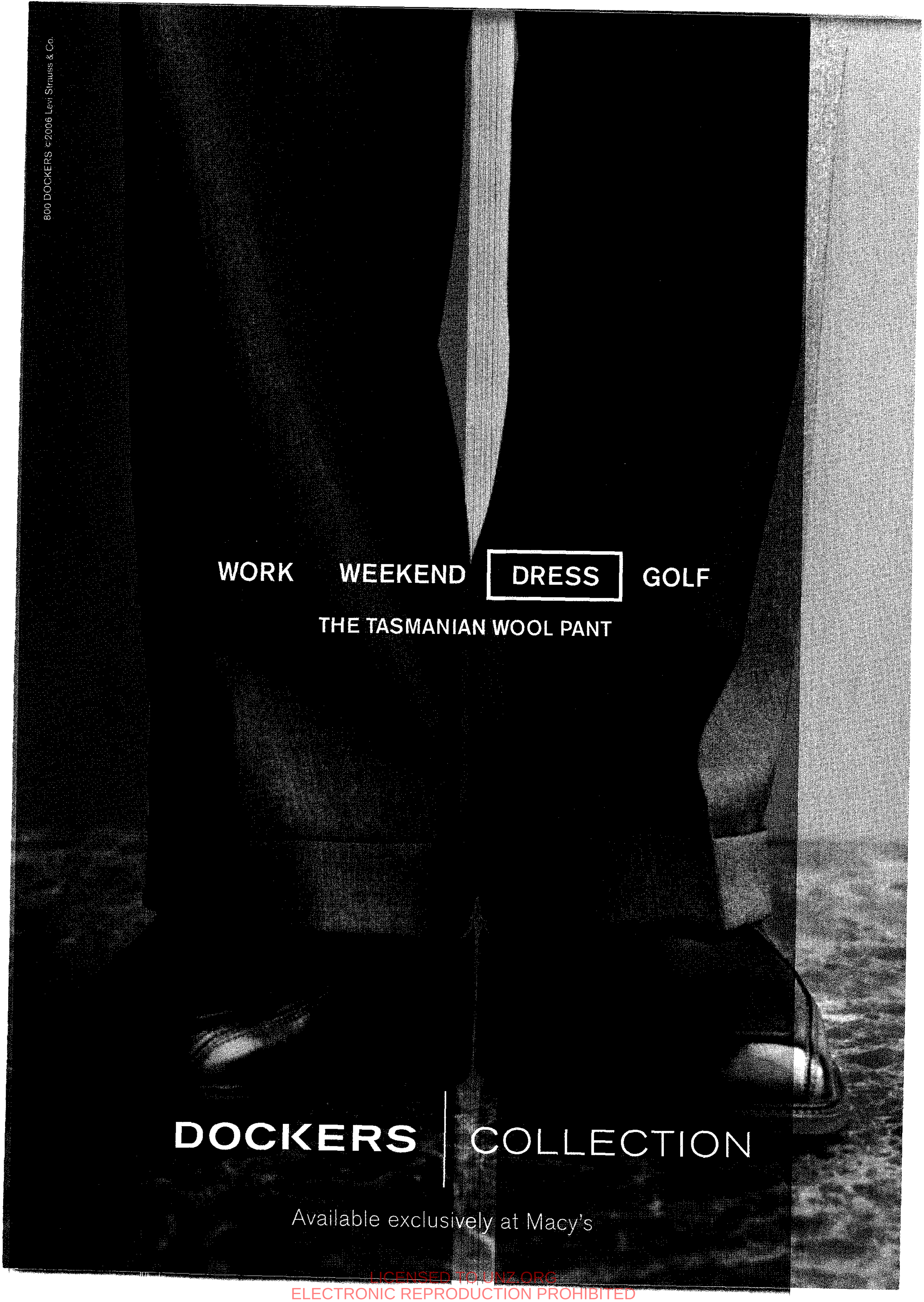
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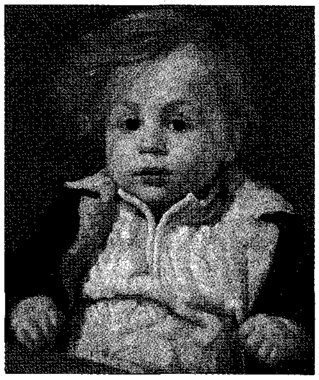
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
NEW CLASSIC

John Currin's paintings are the signal American art works of today. What this says about us isn't flattering, but there are wisps of hope in it. Masterly new canvases at Gagosian uptown expand the range of Currin's dialectic of beauty and grotesquerie, desire and disgust, classicism and crud. The show is long on pornography: threesomes and twosomes (mostly female), grimly toiling to display the mechanics of sex. You get that they have minds (of a sort) at odds with their actions. Clothed, fatuous social types include two heroically posed, pregnant, haute-suburban young dames who face the future with exasperating confidence. Even still-life elements—candelabras, antique china—emit incautious attitude. Currin's skills, now enhanced with positively Venetian color, insure that if it's too late in your life to stop liking painting you're sunk; he has you. With love and loathing, his art unites aspects of disintegrated contemporary selfhood in magnetic fields of imagination. Is real wholeness possible? Two straightforwardly ravishing portraits of the artist's young son dare to wonder.

—Peter Schjeldahl



JOHN CURRIN, "FRANCIS" (2005), COURTESY OF GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE APPLE TREE
Kristin Chenoweth stars in this musical from 1966, based on three stories of temptation, by Mark Twain, Frank R. Stockton, and Jules Feiffer. Gary Griffin directs. In previews. (Studio 54, 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

CARRIE
The première of Theatre Couture's camp take on Stephen King's tale of high-school horror, featuring Sherry Vine and visual effects by Basil Twist. Previews begin Dec. 2. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

COMPANY
John Doyle directs Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's Tony Award-winning musical from 1970, in which a bachelor observes the lives of five married couples. Opens Nov. 29. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

FLOYD AND CLEA UNDER THE WESTERN SKY
In this new musical, David Cale stars as a country singer who travels through the West with a free-spirited young woman. Cale wrote the book and lyrics and co-wrote the music with Jonathan Kreisberg. In previews. Opens Dec. 5. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

GUTENBERG! THE MUSICAL!
Anthony King and Scott Brown wrote this musical satire, about two playwrights who try to hit it big with a musical about the inventor of the printing press, Johannes Gutenberg. In previews. Opens Dec. 3. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HEDDA GABLER
Thomas Ostermeier directs this Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz production of Ibsen's drama from 1891. In German, with English supertitles. Nov. 28-Dec. 2. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

HIGH FIDELITY
Walter Bobbie ("Chicago") directs this musical based on Nick Hornby's best-selling novel, about a record-store owner whose girlfriend breaks up with him. In previews. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

KAOS
Martha Clarke adapted parts of four Luigi Pirandello stories from the Taviani brothers' 1984 film "Kaos." In Italian, with English supertitles. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

KONG
The performance artist Pamela Sneed riffs on cinema and race in her latest one-woman show. Opens Dec. 5. (Kumble Theatre, Long Island University, Flatbush Ave. at Dekalb Ave., Brooklyn. 718-488-1624.)

MURDER MYSTERY BLUES
A noir drama based on a series of short stories by Woody Allen, in which a detective is hired by a woman to find "Mr. Big." Directed by Janey Clarke, with original jazz music by Warren Wills. In previews. Opens Nov. 30. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SPRING AWAKENING
This musical, which originated at Atlantic Theatre Company, is based on Frank Wedekind's play from 1891, about the secret inner lives of teenagers. With music by Duncan Sheik, book and lyrics by Steven Sater, and choreography by Bill T. Jones. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THAT TIME OF THE YEAR
A musical revue of Christmas and Hanukkah songs from the York Theatre Company, directed and choreographed by Annette Jolles. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's, 54th St. east of Lexington Ave. 212-935-5820.)

TWO TRAINS RUNNING
Signature Theatre Company continues its August Wilson series with this portrayal of a Pittsburgh diner in 1969. In previews. Opens Dec. 3. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

THE VERTICAL HOUR
Julianne Moore stars in the world première of David Hare's play about a young war correspondent turned political-science professor whose beliefs are challenged when she meets her boyfriend's English father (Bill Nighy). Sam Mendes directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 30. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT
The return of the Les Freres Corbusier hit, in which a cast of grade-school children bring the famous Scientologists Tom Cruise, Kirstie Alley, and John Travolta and founder L. Ron Hubbard to life in a mock-Christmas pageant. In previews. (4th Street Theatre, 83 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of David Mamet's adaptation of Harley Granville-Barker's play, about a family whose patriarch has acquired their money by embezzlement. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN PILOT
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new drama by David Greig, about a pilot who crash-lands in a rural village in a war-torn country. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE
In the MacArthur-winning playwright Sarah Ruhl's dramatic comedy, Ruhl may poke fun at the trope of the Latina as invisible housecleaner, but she ends up performing her own version of literary typecasting, conveying a lazy romanticism about the proletariat, for whom she seems to have no real feeling at all. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/13/06.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

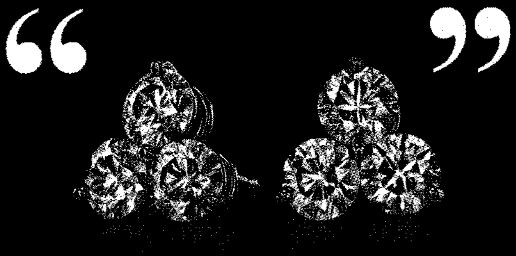
THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE
The first of three plays by Tom Stoppard about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals. The ensemble cast includes Ethan Hawke, Brían F. O'Byrne, Jennifer Ehle, and Billy Crudup. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

DARK MATTERS
Trip Cullman directs Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's drama about mystical happenings surrounding a Midwestern family. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!—THE MUSICAL
Handsomely wrapped and faithful to the book, this production is as attractive as a window display at Saks, but it doesn't have any garlic in its soul. Still, Christmas-weary parents will likely appreciate the stage show's charm and restraint. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

DURANGO
The world première of a new play by Julia Cho, about a Korean father who embarks on a road trip with his teen-age sons. Directed by Chay Yew. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Will Pomerantz directs an affable adaptation of the Dickens classic, and the nimble cast of seven bring a sense of fun to their multiple roles in the tale of Pip (Christian Campbell), a blacksmith's apprentice who is introduced to romantic heartbreak through the tutelage of the wealthy, embittered, and eternally jilted Miss Havisham (a matchless Kathleen Chalfant, clad in spidery Victorian bridal wear) and her coldhearted but ravishing ward, Estella (Kristen Bush). Humble Pip learns snobbery through the expert offices of these two misses, eventually trading his blacksmith's garb for the top hats and affectations of gentlemanly London life. Bathsheba Doran succeeds in translating Dickens's tale for the stage, reminding us of the timeless pleasures of a good yarn. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 3.)



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THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED

Douglas Carter Beane's play about how dreams are made true but ugly in the entertainment business has been transferred to Broadway. At the center of this universe, set in New York and Los Angeles, is a brilliant smiler with a knife, Diane (Julie White), an agent who is trying to save her gay client, Mitchell (the terrific Tom Everett Scott), from certain movie-stardom death: he cannot be both an out gay man and a film star. In White, the prolific director, Scott Ellis, has found not only a great comedic star but an actress who makes the play's various weaknesses less noticeable. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY POPPINS

If Disney's musical version of the P. L. Travers books is about anything at all, it's extravagance. More than two and a half hours long, and with thirty musical numbers bursting with choreography by the energetic Matthew Bourne, Richard Eyre's "Mary Poppins" overloads the senses to such a degree that you stumble out of the theatre in a daze. That Ashley Brown, as Poppins, sings well and sparkles even better just reinforces our favorite image of turn-of-the-century England: a "practically perfect" land of tea and crumpets and rosy cheeks, where everyone is always on the brink of celebrating Christmas. At no point does this Mary Poppins get her hands dirty in a sinkful of Dickensian dishwater. Eyre is to be commended for intimating that, at some time in her life, she might have. (11/27/06) (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747.)

REGRETS ONLY

Manhattan Theatre Club presents the new comedy of manners by Paul Rudnick, about the social mores of a set of wealthy Manhattanites. Starring Christine Baranski and George Grizzard. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

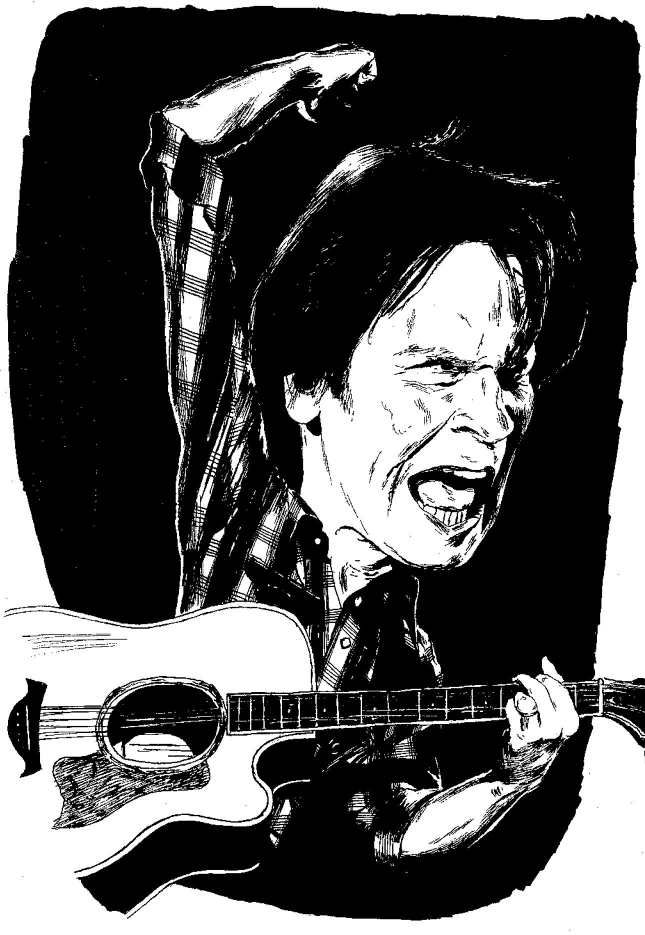
Tennessee Williams's 1958 one-act drama, now in a strong revival by the Roundabout Theatre Company, takes place a few years before America entered the Second World War, in New Orleans's Garden District. Violet (Blythe Danner), whose son, the poet Sebastian Venable, is dead, reveals her goal to Dr. Cukrowicz (Gale Harold): to have him lobotomize her niece, Catharine Holly (Carla Gugino), who, according to Violet, won't stop "babbling" about Sebastian's death. Danner plays Violet as a tease in iron petticoats, a stage mother whose primary audience—her exquisite, refined, educated son—has left her to a world of pernicious fools. Her refusal to be intimidated by Williams's text influences Gugino, a fine actress in her own right whose all-out, nuanced performance highlights the intellectual content of the play. (11/27/06) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WOYZECK

The Gate Theatre London's production of Georg Büchner's proto-Brechtian drama, about a military barber going mad in a mad world, comes to St. Ann's Warehouse under the exceptional direction of Daniel Kramer. Kramer's vision for the play—the script was left in fragments at the time of Büchner's death, in 1837—is like a de Chirico with a jukebox pounding in the corner. Here, Woyzeck (Edward Hogg) rides a tricycle and listens to Elvis, while, elsewhere, a tableau of working-class exploitation is set eerily to Dolly Parton's "9 to 5." Kramer's use of rock and roll isn't just a gimmick; it's a seamless element in a masterfully realized fever dream. (38 Water St. 718-254-8779. Through Dec. 3.)

Also Playing

ARMS AND THE MAN: Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BHUTAN:** Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HEARTBREAK HOUSE:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **AN OAK TREE:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **STRIKING 12:** Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.



The old-school rocker John Fogerty plays the Beacon Theatre.

ANDY FRIEDMAN

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Dec. 1-2: In the late sixties and seventies, the Nigerian performer and agitator Fela Kuti revolutionized the sound of his continent when he injected politics and American funk into his music. He recorded some fifty albums, had numerous scrapes with Nigerian authorities, and married more than two dozen women before he died of complications from AIDS, in 1997. In honor of World AIDS Day, **Amadou & Mariam, Cheikh Lô, Dead Prez, Les Nubians, Meshell Ndegéocello,** and other musicians pay him tribute. The show benefits the African Services Committee, a charity based in Harlem dedicated to the African community in New York City.

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—**John Fogerty** first became famous as the leader of Creedence Clearwater Revival. Since that band broke up, in 1972, he's had an on-again, off-again solo act. His latest release is a career-spanning concert album, "The Long Road Home." On Dec. 1, expect him to reach deep into his back catalogue for the likes of "Lookin' Out My Back Door" and "Fortunate Son."

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 3: Buffalo's **Goo Goo Dolls,** who had a major hit in 1998 with the mellow ballad "Iris," specialize in accessible rock. Their latest release, "Let Love In," continues their solid streak of making music that's ripe for romantic-comedy soundtracks and senior proms.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 1: **Lucie Idlout,** a fierce alternative rocker from Canada with a bluesy approach, is Inuit, and her songs explore the universal human condition through stories about her people. Dec. 3: **Sxip Shirey,** a local circus composer and multi-instrumentalist, celebrates the release of his new CD, "Sombule," in the company of the legendary transgendered accordionist **Baby Dee,** who is known for, among other things, spending much of the past decade riding a custom tricycle outfitted with a harp around Greenwich Village and singing Shirley Temple covers.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 1: **Tenacious D.** Jack Black and Kyle Gass's twisted underground acoustic-heavy-metal act is living proof that if you tell enough people that you are the greatest band in the world you'll end up playing the greatest arena in the world. Of course, it helps to have some Hollywood connections (their major-motion-picture début, "Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny," is in theatres now).

MO PITKIN'S HOUSE OF SATISFACTION

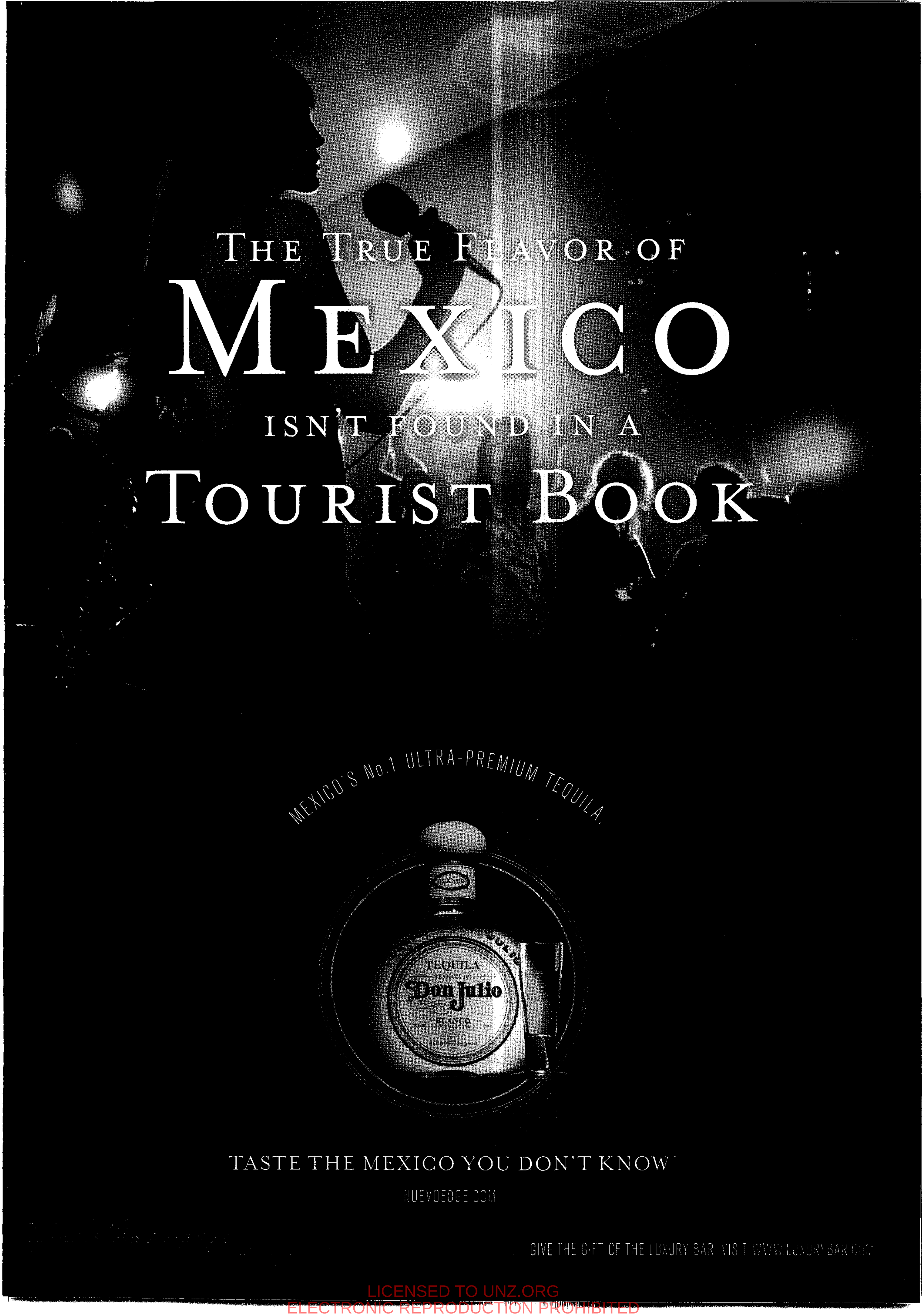
34 Ave. A, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. (212-777-5660)—Oct. 5: The **Chandler Travis Philharmonic.** The irreverent guitarist, singer, and composer Travis, who lives on Cape Cod and has been known to perform barefoot and in his pajamas, returns to New York City for a night of playful originals that mix mind-bending wordplay with Dixieland jazz, shimmering rock, and horn-fuelled R. & B.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 28-29: **Citizen Cope.** Born Clarence Greenwood in Memphis, this singer-songwriter favors complex narratives about everything from race and religion to life on the streets, layered over slow grooves and slightly funky beats. His opening act, **Alice Smith,** is a local singer with a four-octave range. She leans toward ambitious and insightful R. & B. on her début album, "For Lovers, Dreamers & Me." Dec. 1-2: The eager Midwestern jam band **Umphrey's McGee.** Dec. 5: California's **Deftones,** who came out of the nu-metal movement of the late nineties, are one of the most revered acts in heavy metal. On their newly released fifth album, "Saturday Night Wrist," which was produced by Bob Ezrin (of Pink Floyd, Lou Reed, and Alice Cooper fame), the band further distance themselves from the monochromatic metal scene by expanding on the subtlety and cinematic sweep of their music.

REBEL

251 W. 30th St. (212-695-2747)—Dec. 1-2: This intimate new club in a crusty old space (it used to be called Downtime) is home to **Dinosaur Jr.,** the seminal alternative trio, which will be sure to live up to its reputation for high-volume guitar squall.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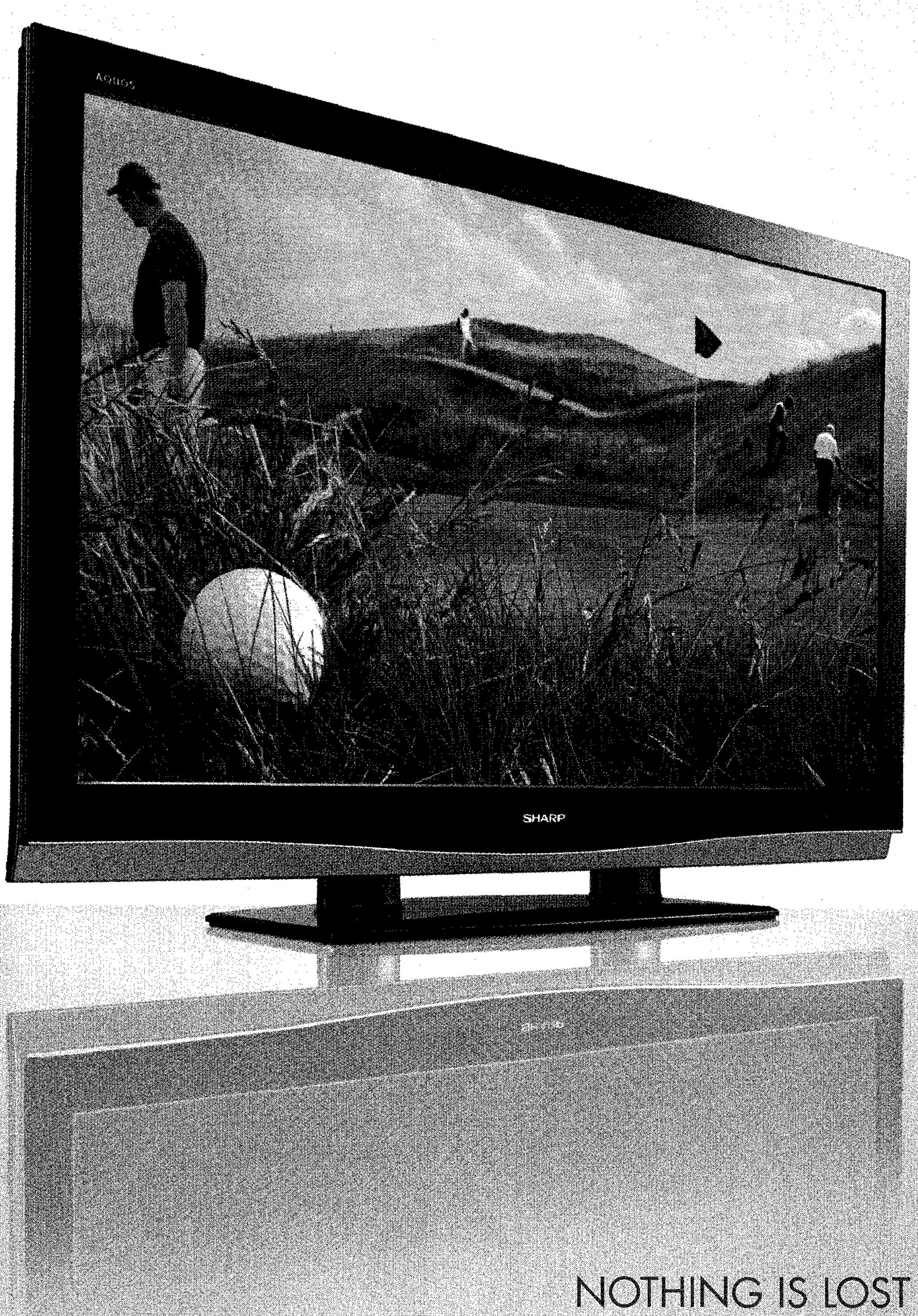

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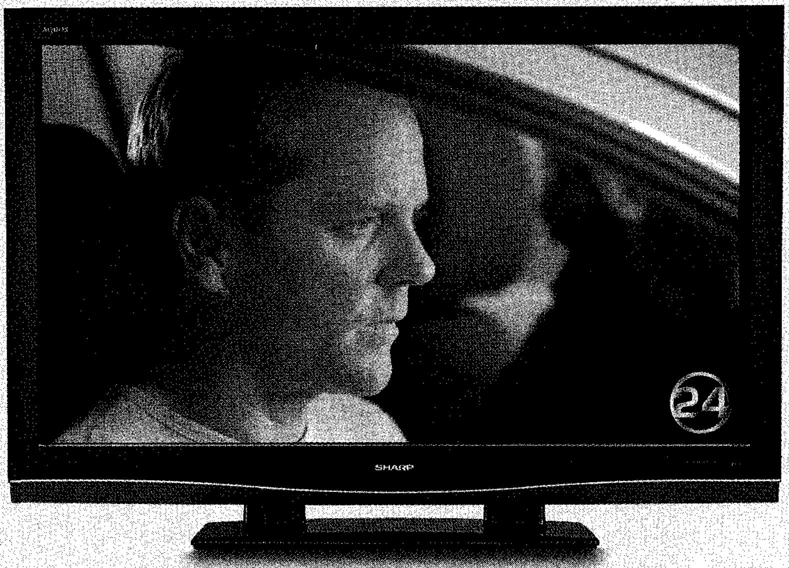

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The two-night, four-hour Season Six première of "24," starring Emmy®-winning Kiefer Sutherland, airs January 14th and 15th from 8–10 P.M. ET/PT on FOX.

CALLING THE SHOTS ON 24

The most action-packed show on TV, "24" careens from crisis to cliffhanger in nearly every scene. The FOX-TV drama was recently recognized with five Emmy Awards, including two for its **director and executive producer, Jon Cassar**. A former camera operator, Cassar approaches the set of this counterterrorism drama with a knowing eye. Here he reveals what goes into producing a series that looks its best on HDTV.

Is there a director who informed your style?

CASSAR: I've always liked the work of François Truffaut and Akira Kurosawa. They use extreme close-ups to dig for a performance, and they understand storytelling and character. That's what makes their films so rich.

What makes "24" so visually exciting?

CASSAR: We never do the same shot twice. We change the angle every single take, and the zooms are going all the time. The uneasiness of the visual style adds to the suspense.

Part of the show's distinctive look is its split-screen boxes. What are their functions?

CASSAR: The boxes energize the feel of a scene and remind viewers that the action is happening at the same time. It also helps remind them of the different story lines.

Does broadcasting in HDTV affect your work?

CASSAR: When we started, only a few people had widescreen HDTV. That's not true anymore. Now so many have that format that the ones who don't ought to catch up with us.

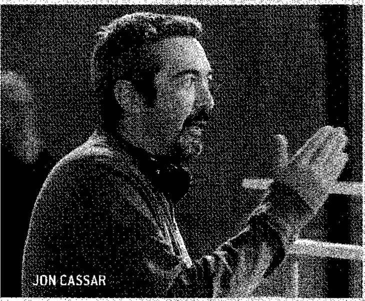
With HD, everyone gets to see the full wide screen. We work with a 16:9 frame size and fill the scene beyond the edges of a standard 4:3 box. Since there are always interesting things in the foreground, HD viewers feel like they're spying on the scene.

What's it like filming action sequences for HDTV?

CASSAR: It's more exciting. Compared to action scenes that used to get lost in a little TV box, having HDTV is almost like CinemaScope. I'm happy to be shooting scenes that people will see with such clarity and detail that make it worth all the effort we put into them.

How does watching "24" in HDTV change the viewer's experience?

CASSAR: The show looks more like a movie. And if you're watching "24" DVDs on HDTV, you're not limited to what a broadcaster spits out. It's virtually a pristine picture. With HDTV, you get to see an episode the way I do when I'm cutting and editing. It looks exactly how we shot it.



JON CASSAR

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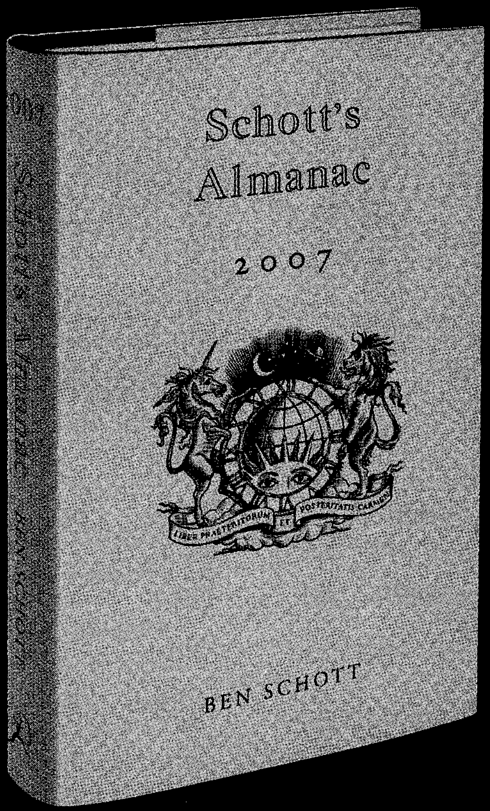

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– creator of *Schott's Original Miscellany*.

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Ephemerides · Foie Gras · Gay Marriage · Gitmo · The Hajj · iPods · *Jyllands-Posten*
'Kosher-to-Kosher' Cells · Lebanon & Israel · Mahmoud Ahmadinejad · 'No Fly List'
Oscars · Online Gaming · Pimp Chic · Qualigate · Ringtones · State of the Union
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ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 30: The shaggy Southern rock of the Louisville ensemble **My Morning Jacket.**

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Nov. 29: The Boulder-based radio variety show "Etown" makes its first visit to New York for a live taping of a holiday special, to be broadcast during Christmas week, with performances by the Canadian singer **Sarah McLachlan,** the former Sixpence None the Richer vocalist **Leigh Nash,** and others. Dec. 4-6: **Ryan Adams.** Sprung from the relative obscurity of the alternative-country rabble-rousers Whiskeytown, Adams evolved from a roots-rock troubadour into a poster boy for flashy rock and roll, gracing Gap ads and palling around with Elton John. He's also a wildly prolific artist whose musical imagination knows no bounds; he recently released thirty-six songs in one pop on his elaborate Web site.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 29: The **Bravery** were pegged as the next big thing by critics when they first started playing together a few years ago. They proved the scribes right by scoring a hit in 2005 with "An Honest Mistake." The ground has shifted a bit since then, with the ascension of Panic! At the Disco and other young bands, but the local modern rockers are ready to double down. Their sophomore album, "The Sun and the Moon," is nearly finished, and they're giving a preview tonight. With the tense guitar rock of another Gotham creation, **Radio 4.**

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—One of the biggest names in the klezmer revival, the clarinettist **David Krakauer** mixes the traditional Eastern European Jewish music with classical, jazz, rock, funk, and hip-hop, all to astonishing effect. On Dec. 2, he and his band, Klezmer Madness!, are joined by the great jazz and funk trombonist **Fred Wesley, Jr.,** who is celebrated for his work with James Brown. Dec. 5: The **Bang on a Can All-Stars** play works by Don Byron, Fred Frith, Thurston Moore, and others in a program entitled "American UnPop."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 29-Dec. 2: The guitarist **Pat Martino** has a well-honed sound that resists imitation. On his latest album, "Remember: A Tribute to Wes Montgomery," he honors one of his biggest influences.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—The flamenco guitarist **Ottmar Liebert** stops by for a run of solo shows Nov. 28-30.

"CHAMBER JAZZ"
Nov. 30: The musical omnivore **Gunther Schuller,** who is celebrating his eighty-first birthday, directs the ten-piece **Mingus Orchestra** in his arrangements of such outstanding Mingus works as "Tonight at Noon" and "Half Mast Inhibition." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 28-Dec. 3: **Manhattan Trinity** unites three of the most dependable and inspired mainstream rhythm players: the pianist **Cyrus Chestnut,** the bassist **George Mraz,** and the drummer **Lewis Nash.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 5-31: The pianist and vocalist **Michael Feinstein** returns with his annual holiday show, a merry evening with an ecumenical and inclusive focus.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 29: Equally comfortable making gorgeous music with a group or on his own, **Gene Bertoncini** appears with his acoustic and electric guitars in both solo and trio settings during this noteworthy one-night stand. Nov. 30-Dec. 3: The Tango Meets Jazz Festival. **Pablo Ziegler,** a pianist with the late Astor Piazzolla's now-legendary New Tango Quintet, leads his own ensemble with **Héctor del Curto** on bandoneon. The saxophonist **David Sánchez** joins him on Dec. 1, and the flutist **Nestor Torres** is his guest the following evenings.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 2: The **Microscopic Septet,** which featured two of the most sophisticated and stylistically slippery jazz composers and players—the pianist **Joel Forrester** and the saxophonist **Phillip Johnston**—reigned on the downtown music scene in the late eighties and early nineties. To celebrate the release of two career-spanning retrospective double albums, "Seven Men in Neckties" and "Surrealistic Swing," the group is reuniting for a brief tour.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Balancing a hurdling technique with lilting swing, the guitarist **Russell Malone,** who has accompanied Diana Krall and Ron Carter, takes center stage on Dec. 1.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 28-Dec. 3: The trumpet and flugelhorn stylist **Tom Harrell** is joined by the saxophonist **Wayne Escoffery** in an increasingly distinctive quintet that highlights the leader's sharp compositions and arrangements. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s"** features work by ten Weimar-era artists, including Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Ludwig Meidner. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** Through Dec. 10. ♦ **"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf."** Through Sept. 3, 2007. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Manet and the Execution of Maximilian."** Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Wind."** Through Feb. 5. ♦ **"OMA in Beijing: China Central Television Headquarters by Ole Scheeren and Rem Koolhaas."** Models, renderings, and related drawings track plans for an innovative complex of buildings, scheduled to open before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Through Feb. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and History."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005."** Through Feb. 11. ♦ All roads in modernism lead back to Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy in **"Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ Works by Edward Hopper fill the fifth floor, including "Nighthawks," on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005."** Through

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BEAUTY IN THE BEAT

Pamela Sneed is a six-foot-three-inch-tall black woman with a shaved head, a big smile, and a wily sense of humor. Born and raised outside Boston, she began making a name for herself in New York in the early nineties as a writer at poetry slams and other performance-art venues while teaching at Hetrick-Martin, an organization for gay, lesbian, and transgendered youth. There and elsewhere, Sneed gave voice to the fraction of the city's population suffering from AIDS, poverty, and bias-related crimes. In her new performance piece, "Kong," at Long Island University's Kumble Theatre, in Brooklyn, on Tuesdays Dec. 5-19, Sneed the activist tackles—from a distinctly and delightfully partisan point of view—our contemporary American cinema as it relates or, more specifically, doesn't relate to race. And she's taking on Katrina and our health-care system, while she's at it. Gorgeous in her lack of restraint, Sneed has a voice—she earns a little money on the side doing voice-overs—that sounds like a cello, but a cello that's interested only in dissonance, not the sound of mourning.

—*Hilton Als*

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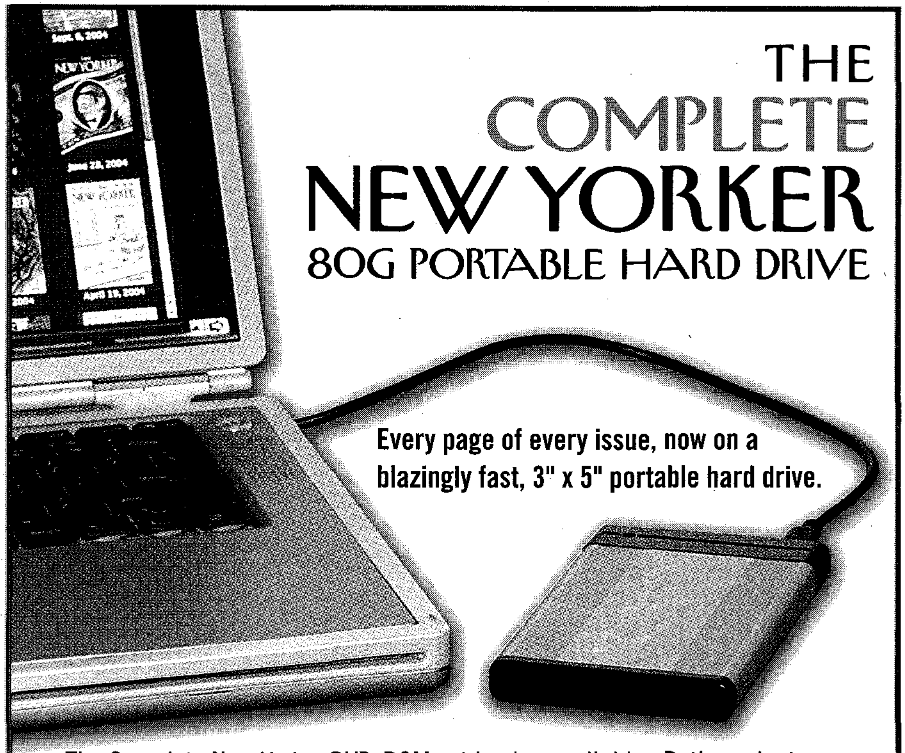

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Jan. 21. ♦ **"Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Ron Mueck."** Through Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—In the sixties, Eleanore Mikus seemed poised for success. Her paintings were widely exhibited and acquired by major museums. Then she withdrew from, or was not beckoned further into, the art world. A gorgeous retrospective, **"From Shell to Skin,"** presents works dating from 1960 to the present and suggests that such exile can be a blessing. Mikus makes grids: barely there, tensile structures intimately involved with the fundamental signifier of high modernism. Her drawings, paintings, reliefs, and collages suggest now LeWitt, now Martin, now Ryman. But the mark-making is resonantly personal, and the technical experiments—pencil on hand-folded paper; epoxy, acrylic, enamel, and oil on various supports; cast bronze; even cloth gridded with rubber bands—bespeak a vision that neither stalls nor wavers. Through Feb. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804): A New Testament."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations."** Opens Dec. 1. ♦ **"Fragonard and the French Tradition."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Bob Dylan's American Journey: 1956-1966."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"A City on Paper: Saul Steinberg's New York."** Opens Dec. 1. ♦ **"Black Style Now."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Willing to Be Lucky: Ambitious New Yorkers in the Pages of *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Entering **"High Plane V"** by Katrín Sigurdardóttir, one encounters a pair of ladders in an empty, sunlit room. Windows on two walls of the former public-school classroom survey a Long Island City panorama, but the viewer is invited to turn away, climb the narrow steps, and stick his or her head into a hole in the ceiling. Like Alice or Gulliver, the voyager emerges in another world—a cool, totally enclosed, patently false and yet oddly convincing landscape of ice and snow. Radically out of scale but strangely familiar, the model vista feels expansive and remote—until another head pops up through the second hole. Through May 7. ♦ **"John Latham: Time Base and the Universe"** surveys fifty years of painting, sculpture, and film by the British artist (1921-2006). Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"Defamation of Character."** Through Jan. 8. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

DAVID BAILEY
In 1962, when he shot these photographs of Jean Shrimpton for British *Vogue*, Bailey was twenty-four and Shrimpton (his girlfriend at the time) was just twenty. Their youth probably accounts for the big Teddy bear Shrimpton carries throughout the shoot; it also keeps the mood light and playful. Working on the streets of New York, Bailey incorporates landmarks from the U.N. building to the Brooklyn Bridge as well as locals who would not have been out of place in an Arbus photo (one passerby sticks his tongue out at the camera). He can't really compete with William Klein or Garry Winogrand on this turf, but Bailey still stakes a memorable claim. Through Dec. 16. (Faggionato, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9761.)

GREGORY CREWDSON
Crewdson, whose current work involves a production crew large enough for a feature film, made this group of small black-and-white photos entirely on his own in 1996. Setting his camera for long exposures at dusk and after dark, he photographed the delicate tracery of fireflies lacing the woods around his family's summer cabin. In some pictures the firefly action is so intense it looks like a snowball fight; in others, you can't see much more than what appears to be flecks of dust wafting through the darkened landscape. The simplicity of the project and the modesty of the results is especially winning after years of Crewdson's elaborately staged tableaux. Here, he revisits his work's roots in childlike excitement and uncomplicated wonder. Through Dec. 9. (Skarstedt, 1018 Madison Ave, at 78th St. 212-737-2060.)

MARILYN MINTER
Minter's paintings use traditional seventies Photo-Realist strategies to critique beauty culture, although her approach is more bare-knuckled than that of progenitors like Audrey Flack. Her favored tropes include the closeup of a high heel dragged through a mud puddle, lips caressing a strand of jewels, and eyes blackened indeterminably by mascara or bruises. All are present here in four paintings and three large-scale photographs. It's hard to tell the difference between the two (hint: the photographs are behind shiny Plexiglas), and yet one wonders if the photographs don't diminish Minter's project. Isn't the point to painstakingly render the grotesqueries and victims of the beauty industry rather than record them as an enterprising, "edgy" fashion photographer might? Through Jan. 20. (Salon 94, 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212.)

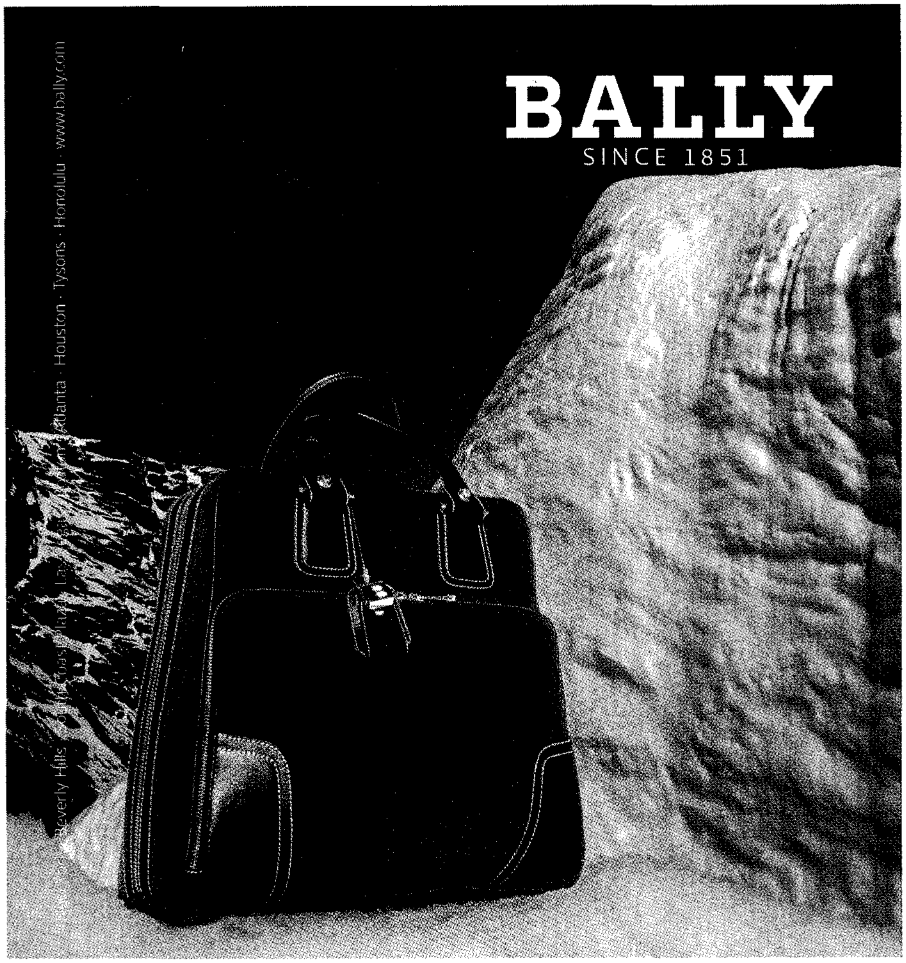
ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH
The German photographer who catalogued the natural and material world in his influential 1928 book "Die Welt Ist Schön" ("The World Is Beautiful") exemplifies the cool, objective approach the Bechers have since passed on to Gursky, Ruff, and Struth. This show of black-and-white prints made between 1926 and 1962 includes some handsome pictures of trees and plants, but its real meat is industrial: factories, machinery, and their component parts. Renger-Patzsch's images of gleaming silos and smokestacks find echoes in the work of Charles Sheeler and the Bechers. His photos of the factory floor are even more distinctive, however, and a study of the gleaming inner workings of some anonymous machine steals the show. Through Dec. 9. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

Short List

JOHN CURRIN: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 22. **RICHARD ESTES:** Susan Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 212-489-3331. Through Dec. 9. **LUCIAN FREUD:** Acquavella, 18 E. 79th St. 212-734-6300. Through Dec. 6. **SARAH MORRIS:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Dec. 3. **ROBERT POLIDORI:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Dec. 23. **SIGMAR POLKE:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Jan. 13. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **SAUL STEINBERG:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Opens Nov. 28. **CHARLES H. TRAUB:** Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Through Dec. 13. **ADAM VAN DOREN:** Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342. Through Dec. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

TOM BAMBERGER
Alongside several of the big, computer-manipulated panoramic landscapes that he's been showing recently, Bamberger brings out a group of eight black-and-white photos from the early nineteen-nineties that are far more interesting. Although these pictures of suburban sprawl and backyard barbecues aren't entirely naturalistic (he used strobes outdoors and adapted an extremely high-resolution laser recording film), they have a dark, ominous tone, as if each one was made moments before disaster struck. On these broad lawns, under these whited-out skies, Bamberger connects with the spirits of Bill Owens and Robert Adams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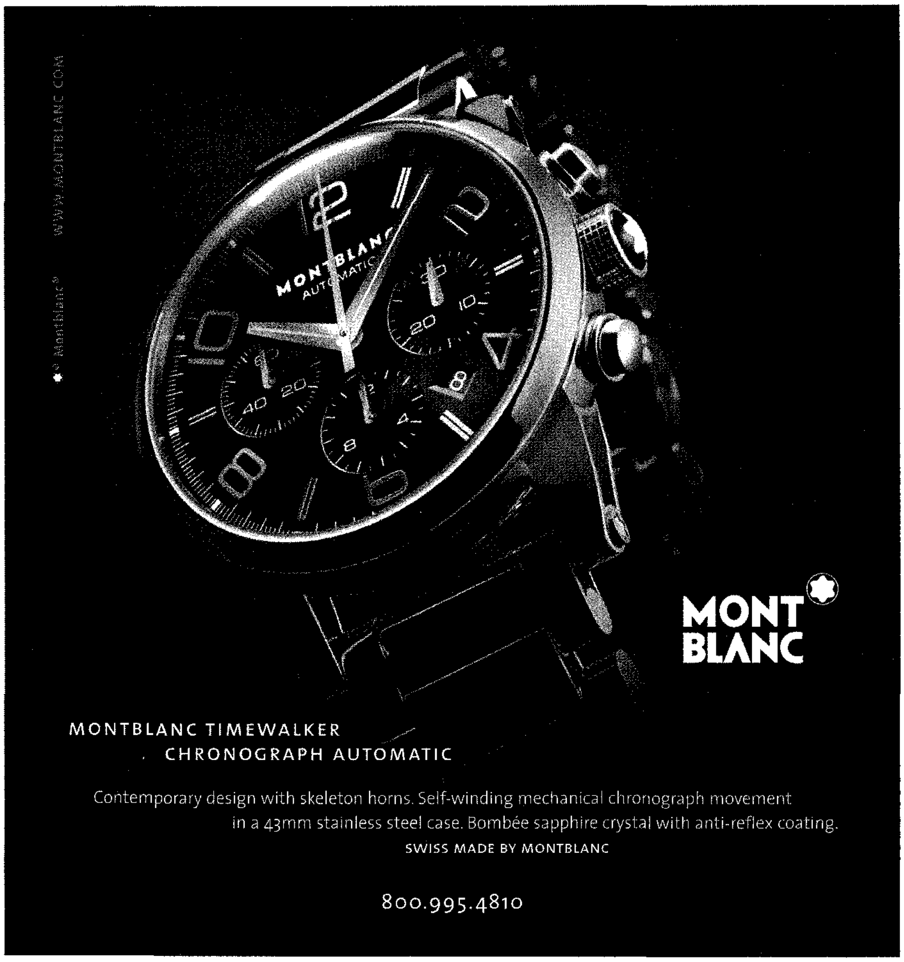
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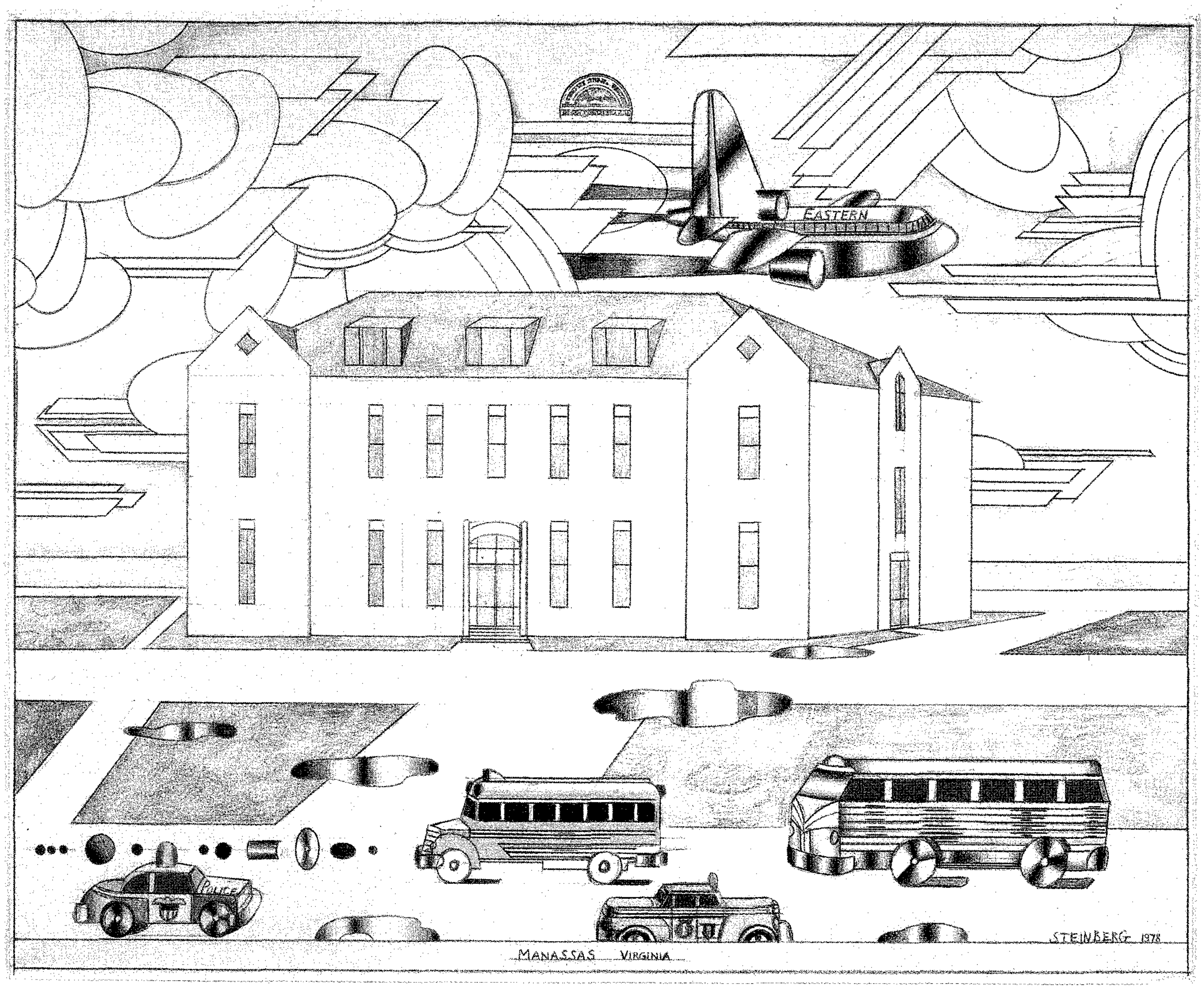

Three shows opening this week celebrate the work of Saul Steinberg, including the Morgan Library's retrospective "Illuminations."

SAUL STEINBERG, "MANASSAS, VIRGINIA" (1978), © THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION

and touches on the source of his current alienation. Through Dec. 2. (Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450.)

ELLSWORTH KELLY
In a move of mutual recognition, Matthew Marks has handed over his Chelsea real estate to Kelly for a three-gallery extravaganza. In return, the venerable blue-chip octogenarian offers a suite of new black-and-white paintings (on Twenty-second Street) that take his signature rhomboid compositions to further reduction. "Drawings on a Bus—Sketchbook 23, 1954," in the next-door space, showcases washy black-and-white abstractions created after Kelly returned from six years in Paris. Four paintings on Twenty-fourth Street offer an eyeful of retina-popping color. In each, two different solid-painted canvases are stacked and placed on one of four walls, creating a showdown between primary colors and their faithful standby, green. Through Jan. 27. (523 W. 24th St., 522 W. 22nd St., and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

ROBERT LONGO
Longo's massive charcoal drawings flaunt velvet blacks and pristine whites, marrying hyperrealist detail to handmade surface effects. The results can be portentous, as suggested by the current exhibition's title, "The Outward and Visible Signs of an Inward and Invisible Grace." Happily, the bombast clears like mist. The show opens with a pair of tiny works, unusual for Longo, that copy Bosch's "Creation of the World" and Pollock's "Autumn Rhythm." Twin photographs follow, of the artist's son and the daughter of a friend, both sleeping. The children seem to be dreaming the universe. The subsequent big images depict planets, and the best—of the sun and of a starshot nebula—evince a baroque energy that only drawing can achieve. Through Dec. 9. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

FIONA RAE
Exclamation points haven't made many inroads in the world of painting titles, except, perhaps, in the heyday of Pop art. Rae, however, isn't averse to using them, often in serial form. Canvases like "I'm Learning to Fly!!," "Take Me to Your Nest!," and "Look!! Look!! Look!!" attempt to match the titles with manic, exuberant colors, clashing patterns, and forms that mimic everything from manga and anime to wallpaper and stylized takes on Ab Ex gesture and drips. Working her way through a post-post-Pop idiom, Rae pushes past painters like Kenny Scharf, adopting the tripped-out goofiness of cartoons and graffiti but also the cloying cuteness of Hello Kitty-type kittens, stars, and flowers. Through Dec. 2. (PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258.)

Short List

DAN FLAVIN: Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Dec. 22. **MAUREEN GALLACE:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Dec. 22. **CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Dec. 9. **RAY JOHNSON:** Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500. Through Dec. 23. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through Dec. 16. **HIROSHI SUGIMOTO:** Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018. Through Dec. 9. **ANDY WARHOL:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. and 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1111. Through Dec. 22. **CATHERINE YASS:** Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through Dec. 9.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Once again this season, in Balanchine's classic version of "The Nutcracker," Marie slays the evil mouse king with her slipper, and the snowflake maidens waltz in the wintry forest. Casts are available on the company's Web site a week in advance. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 29-30 and Dec. 5 at 6, Dec. 1 at 8, Dec. 2 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 3 at 1 and 5. Through Dec. 30.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The first week of their annual December encampment at City Center finds the peerless Ailey dancers trying out some uncharacteristic modes. One is early-eighties Twyla Tharp, with a company première of "The Golden Section"—the radiant coda to Tharp's collaboration with David Byrne, "The Catherine Wheel." The other is a new work by Karole Armitage, on a creative roll of late with her own company. Set to an Indonesian-inspired score by Lou Harrison, "Gamelan Gardens" transfers Armitage's torqued daisy chains, body rolls, and extreme extensions to a large and powerful cast. The movement is expansive, but the mood is inward and contemplative. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Nov. 29 at 7, Nov. 30-Dec. 1 at 8, Dec. 2 at 2 and 8, Dec. 3 at 3 and 7:30, and Dec. 5 at 7. Through Dec. 31. For complete schedule, visit www.alvinailey.org.)

BALLET PRELJOCAJ
The superb company directed by the French experimental choreographer Angelin Preljocaj returns with two of his fluid, attention-grabbing dances: his hard-

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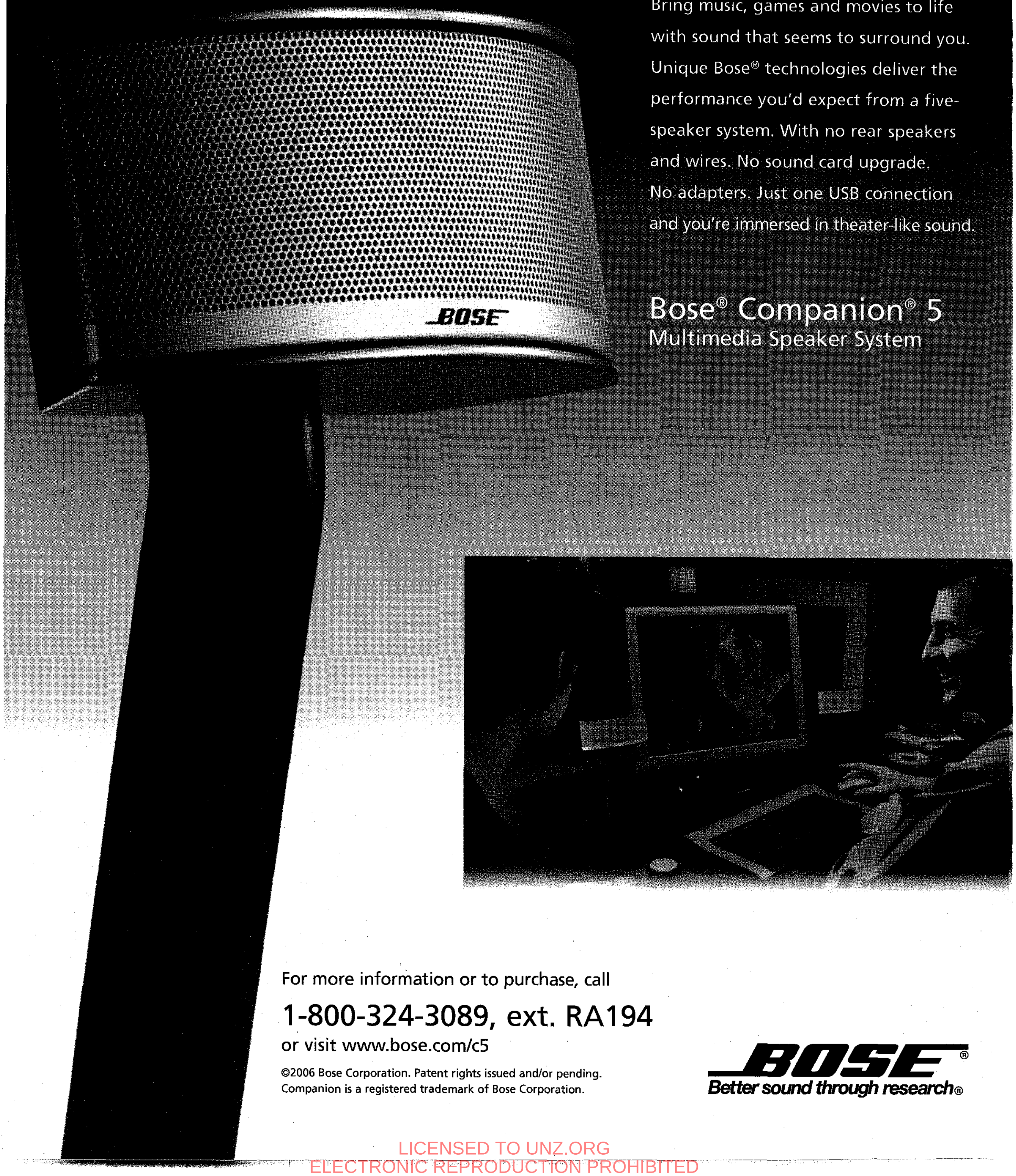

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driving “Noces” (from 1989), set to Stravinsky, and “Empty Moves (Part 1),” a New York première set to an excerpt from John Cage’s “Empty Words.” (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 28-29 at 7:30, Nov. 30-Dec. 2 at 8, and Dec. 3 at 2 and 7:30.)

LUIS LARA MALVACÍAS
For Malvacías’s newest piece, “There Is No Such Thing,” the “thing” being refuted is linear structure; the work consists of twenty-one short, self-sufficient sections that alternate between explosive, earthy movement, deconstructions of phrases and words, and clever manipulations of objects. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 28-Dec. 2 at 7:30.)

ARTHUR AVILES TYPICAL THEATRE
Still remembered as a sparkplug of the Bill T. Jones company, Aviles celebrates the tenth anniversary of his own troupe in its Bronx home base. His new work, “Ear to Ground Fantasia: Thinking Nature,” grew out of the image of children playing near train tracks, alert to danger; later, it incorporated concerns about global warming and video projections of oil spills. The meandering dance moves through avian attitudes and children’s play, pastoral delicacy set against percussive stomps and claps. All tends toward the earth: a woman does the backstroke across it; the whole group piles up on the floor. (Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, 841 Barretto St., the Bronx. 718-842-5223. Nov. 30-Dec. 1 at 8.)

RISA JAROSLOW AND DANCERS
“Resist/Surrender,” a new work for Danspace Project, manages both to question and to harness the power of masculinity. A large chorus of ordinary guys—firefighters, math teachers, lawyers—reinforces a quartet of three male dancers and a tomboy (Elise Knudson). In rituals of belts and neckties, rough sports and skittish intimacy, the quartet continually locks into three-on-one confrontations, but the power dynamics constantly shift. Knudson is and is not just one of the guys. And when the competitive tension explodes in acrobatic wrestling, the dancers hurling and slamming each other up against a wall, the spectacle thrills as much as it appalls. (St. Mark’s In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Nov. 30-Dec. 3 at 8:30.)

CIRCUS OZ
The inventive Australian troupe wins over even the most jaded circus-goer by performing the stunts with cheeky humor and cool accoutrements, like a live band that knows how to rock. Yes, you’ve seen the BMX bike act before, but have you seen it with a matador theme? In the fiery finale, drumsticks, hula hoops, and bike wheels blaze while the performers shimmy to a burlesque-style tune. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Dec. 1 at 7, Dec. 2 at 1 and 7, and Dec. 3 at noon and 7. Through Dec. 31.)

TABLES FOR TWO
PAPATZUL

55 Grand St. (212-274-8225)—The other day, Thierry Amezcua, the owner and chef of Papatzul (Mayan for “food for the lords”) was explaining to a visitor that garlic has no place in guacamole, not as it has been prepared in Mexico for hundreds of years. Amezcua’s guacamole, it should be said, is not only traditional, it is excellent: tart (plenty of lime juice), with generous amounts of cilantro and chopped jalapeños. Still, so many people have grown accustomed to guacamole tasting of garlic that the question has become a sore one. (Amezcua was recently coerced into an informal “guac-off,” which he lost; his opponent resorted to garlic.)

Much of the best food here is built around chiles: from the chile relleno (a gorgeous, slightly smoky poblano stuffed with squash) to the *budín al pasilla* (a casserole of chicken and pasilla chiles) to the lamb (ribs rubbed with ancho chiles, with caramelized apples and sweet potatoes on the side). There are also some successful nods to street food, like the quesadillas, dense, thick pockets of fresh masa, stuffed with a variety of savory fillings. The simple desserts have some interesting touches, like the hunk of *palanqueta*—a traditional pecan brittle with a fudgelike consistency—garnishing the dulce-de-leche ice cream.

Although Amezcua was schooled in classic French cooking and has worked as a chef in New York for the past fifteen years (Savoy, Il Buco), this is his effort to provide something homier—something evocative of how you’d be received in someone’s house in Mexico City, where he is from. The operation feels very much like a family affair (Amezcua’s wife, Debby, co-manages the restaurant and helps out with the cooking; the photographs of Tulum and the traditional Mexican masks that adorn the walls are on loan from his brother). The bartender is from Coyoacán, Amezcua’s old neighborhood in Mexico City, and patrons can often be found at the bar speaking Spanish and slowly sipping tequila. The tequila list, which is much longer than the wine list, ranges from young *blancos* to *reposados* (aged several months) to *añejos* (aged over a year). “When someone is drinking just the Cuervo,” the bartender said one recent rainy night, as a *huapango* trio played traditional music from Veracruz, “I know that something must be wrong.” (Open Tuesdays through Fridays for dinner, weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $15-$22.)

—*Kate Julian*

JOHANNES WIELAND
Now splitting his time between New York and Germany, Wieland continues to explore his ambivalence toward the seductive and numbing appeal of media images, particularly from television, in “Progressive Coma.” Onstage there is a TV, and there is an axe. Videos and slides blur image and reality. A host figure invites the audience to have feelings—safe feelings—and he extolls the virtues of the perfect car, the perfect body, the perfect breakfast cereal. The sharp, chic choreography is relentlessly cold. Sex abounds (as does nudity), but it involves lots of ice. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. Nov. 30-Dec. 2 at 8 and Dec. 3 at 7.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
This admirable chamber company presents its simplified “Nutcracker,” only an hour long and designed for the enjoyment of children. The lovingly crafted costumes and sets are meant to evoke the English nineteenth-century “toy theatres,” and the choreography is straightforward and effective. Company dancers perform the roles of Clara and the Nutcracker prince, complemented by students from the company school as the mice, the angels, and a flock of adorable sheep. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Dec. 2 at 11 A.M. and Dec. 3 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 17.)

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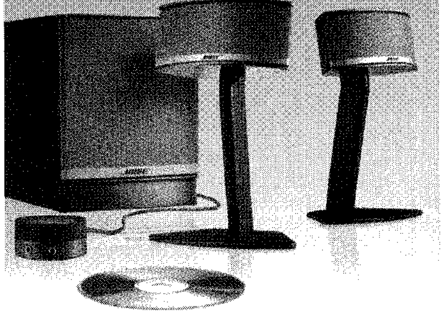

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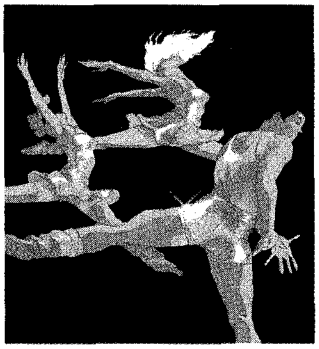
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
REDEMPTION

Twyla Tharp's "The Catherine Wheel" (1981), set to a score by David Byrne, portrayed a very ugly family. The parents quarrelled viciously. The father humped the family pet. The children were equally repellent. Sharing the stage was a chorus that danced convulsively, as if sucking up the anguish. None of this ever got better. Finally, it just stopped, and Tharp, having taken us through Hell, shot us to Heaven, in a fifteen-minute finale called "The Golden Section." Here the same dancers who had been the family and the chorus reappeared in gold costumes—not characters now, but an ensemble—and did a dance of supreme, skyrocketing virtuosity. They walked up each other's backs, jumped off each other's shoulders, threw themselves into thin air. And all of them landed safely—indeed, gorgeously. Just as, earlier, everything anyone did gave pain, now everything worked. This week, "The Golden Section," as a self-contained piece, will be revived by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, which, with its fearless dancers, is well-equipped to perform it.

—*Joan Acocella*



ture and complex states of mind, using his body and his extraordinarily expressive face. Expanding on last year's program ("Duality"), Hakoshima once again collaborates with the fine new-music group the Da Capo Players in a program that explores the underwater world, the inner life of the marionette, and the sensations of autumn. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. Dec. 2 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Kobie van Rensburg, who earned the respect of Met audiences through his authoritative performances in Handel's "Rodelinda," takes the leading role in Mozart's **"Idomeneo,"** lately filled by Ben Heppner. The rest of the roster, which includes Dorothea Röschmann, Alexandra Deshorties, and Magdalena Kožená, is similarly gilt-edged; expect a rich and propulsive performance from James Levine and the orchestra. (Nov. 29 at 8 and Dec. 2 at 1.) ♦ **"Don Carlo"** may be one of Verdi's greatest operas, but it is notoriously difficult to cast. For this revival of the John Dexter production, the Met has pulled out all the stops, bringing the talents of Patricia Racette, Olga Borodina, Johan Botha, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, René Pape, and Samuel Ramey to the task; Levine. (Nov. 30 and Dec. 4 at 7.) ♦ All that glitters is not Gelb, as the latest revival of **"La Bohème"** proves. Franco Zeffirelli's grandiose production—the epitome of Met values, circa 1981—hardly allows for intimacy, but it can't be reproached for want of voluptuous scenery, vivacity, or charm. The Chilean soprano Angela Marambio, a robust yet expressive singer, makes a successful début as Mimì alongside an experienced Rodolfo, the silk-toned Rolando Villazón. The always impressive bass John Relyea makes the most of the plum little part of Colline; Plácido Domingo conducts, with admirable restraint. (Dec. 1 at 8.) ♦ For one performance only, the incandescent Russian soprano Anna Netrebko replaces Marambio. (Dec. 5 at 8.) ♦ The gloriously archaic Zeffirelli production of **"Tosca"** still pulls in the crowds. This revival features Andrea Gruber, Walter Fraccaro, and James Morris; Nicola Luisotti, an impressive addition to the Met lineup, conducts. (Dec. 2 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

DICAPO OPERA
New York's third-ranked professional company stages the final two installments of Puccini's "Il Trittico"—the melodramatic **"Suor Angelica"** and the delightfully inventive **"Gianni Schicchi"**—as a vehicle for several of its promising young professionals; John DiCostanzo conducts. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. Dec. 2 at 8 and Dec. 3 at 4.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Paul Wittgenstein, the one-armed brother of the philosopher Ludwig, was famous not only for commissioning prominent composers to write piano music for the left hand alone but for rejecting works that did not meet his extremely conservative taste. One victim was Prokofiev; another was Hindemith, whose "Piano Music with Orchestra (Piano: Left Hand)" was long assumed to have been lost. Leon Fleisher, who gave the world première with the Berlin Philharmonic in 2004, performs the New York première with Lorin Maazel and his musicians; the rest of the concert features favorite works by Roussel (the "Bacchus et Ariane" Suite No. 2) and Strauss (the Final Scene from "Salome," with the capable soprano Nancy Gustafson). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 30 at 7:30 and Dec. 2 at 8.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA: "BRANDENBURG REDUX"
The conductorless chamber orchestra offers two of Bach's ebullient masterworks—Nos. 1 and 2—with a twist: "Brandenburg Journal," a new work by Stephen Hartke. Jeremy Denk, the soloist in the Concerto for Keyboard and Orchestra in D Minor, BWV 1052, makes his Carnegie Hall début. (212-247-7800. Dec. 2 at 8.)

"A CHANTICLEER CHRISTMAS"
Hearing music in the majestic intimacy of the Metropolitan Museum's Medieval Sculpture Hall is an essential New York experience—never better than during a concert by the gentlemen of Chanticleer, one of the nation's blue-ribbon choral groups. Their program will include, as always, a selection of carols, spirituals, and short sacred works from the Medieval and Renaissance eras. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 3 and Dec. 5-6 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS
Peter Phillips's renowned British chamber choir, a favorite guest of Columbia's Miller Theatre series, offers polyphonic works of the Tudor period by Tye, Tallis, and Taverner at a suitable off-campus location, St. Thomas Church. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 5 at 8.)

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Joshua Bell, offering Brahms's Violin Concerto, is the soloist in a Carnegie Hall concert that also features Sofia Gubaidulina's "Feast During a Plague" (inspired by the Pushkin story) and Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks"; Andrew Davis conducts. (212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

MIRÓ QUARTET
Passion and precision are the hallmarks of this exciting young ensemble, which has already established itself as one of the leading American string quartets. Nov. 29 at 7:30: The group performs a concert on the schedule of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in which it offers works by Arriaga, Shostakovich (the Quartet No. 14), and Dvořák (the Quartet in A-Flat Major, Op. 105). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.) ♦ Dec. 1 at 7: The Mirós move on to the Metropolitan Museum to join forces with the formidable guitarist Eliot Fisk, to perform the identical Arriaga quartet (No. 3) along with works by Boccherini and Leonardo Balada (the world première of his "Caprichos No. 2" for guitar and strings); Fisk will also offer a selection of solo pieces. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

"NEW WORKS AT THE THALIA"
Symphony Space's intimate Thalia Theatre is the venue for a continuing series of contemporary-music concerts. The latest of them features the flutist Christina Jennings and the bassoonist Peter Kolkay in a program of new and recent works by David Lang ("Press Release"), Paul Moravec, and Laura Elise Schwendinger, in addition to classic pieces by Takemitsu and Villa-Lobos. (Broadway at 96th St. 212-864-5400. Nov. 30 at 7:30.)

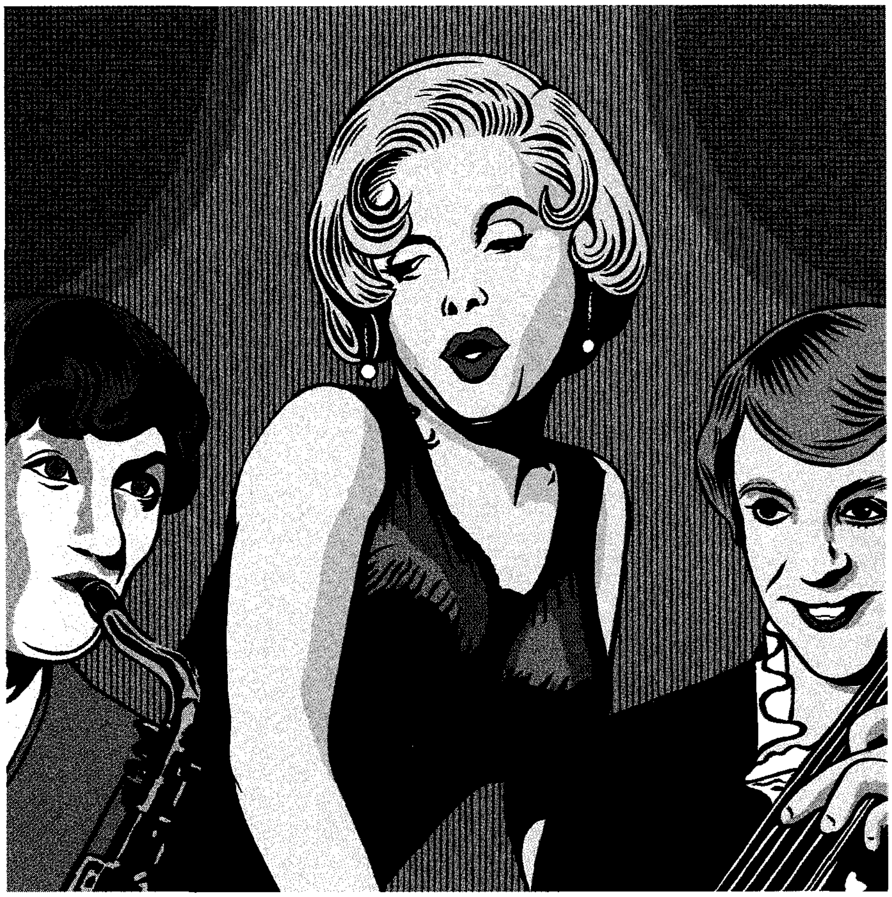
RAQUELA SHEERAN
It would be hard to find a soprano with more varied musical interests than Sheeran: her Alice Tully Vocal Arts Début Recital (presented by Juilliard) features works by Josef Bardanashvili (Three Scenes for Soprano, Strings, and Flute Solo, performed with the Axiom Ensemble) and Osvaldo Golijov, along with songs by Gershwin, Rachmaninoff, Korngold ("Songs of the Clown"), Strauss ("Mädchenblumen," Op. 22), and Flanders and Swann. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Nov. 30 at 8.)

JUAN DIEGO FLÓREZ
The supreme coloratura tenor makes his Carnegie Hall début singing songs and arias by Mozart ("Il mio tesoro"), Rossini, Donizetti, Fauré, and the popular Peruvian composer Rosa Mercedes Ayarza de Morales. (212-247-7800. Dec. 1 at 8.)

"ON WINGS OF SONG": RICHARD COX
The Marilyn Horne Foundation recital series presents the young Metropolitan Opera tenor, who sings a program that modulates from Handel, Brahms, and Wolf to Barber ("Knoxville: Summer of 1915," rarely performed by a tenor) and Blitzstein. Thomas Bagwell accompanies him. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St. 212-378-0248. Dec. 3 at 3.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
A group of the orchestra's virtuosos goes out on a limb with an unconventional program of works

TOMER HANUKA



In "Some Like It Hot," at MOMA, Marilyn Monroe meets the boys in the band.

by Boccherini, Vaughan Williams, Khachaturian (the Trio for Violin, Clarinet, and Piano), Arensky, and Stravinsky (the Octet). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Dec. 3 at 3.)

YEVGENY SUDBIN
The Frick Collection continues its sterling record of commitment to fine young artists by presenting the New York début of the Russian pianist, who offers works by Scarlatti, Chopin (the Ballade No. 4 in F Minor), Debussy, and Scriabin (the Second and Fifth Sonatas and four mazurkas). (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Dec. 3 at 5.)

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS: "AMERICAN UNPOP"
This "electric art-music ensemble," the gold standard of downtown cool, is nothing if not loyal. Their Zankel Hall concert features new music by such longtime friends as Don Byron, Julia Wolfe, Thurston Moore, and Martin Bresnick (including the haunting, Kafka-inspired "Bucket Rider"), a crucial mentor for the group, who turned sixty this year. (212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE ARCHITECT
A drama, directed by Matt Tauber and starring Anthony LaPaglia and Viola Davis, about a campaign to tear down a blighted urban housing project in Chicago. Opening Dec. 1. (IFC Center.)

FOUR EYED MONSTERS
A comedy by Arin Crumley and Susan Buice about two multimedia artists who meet online and start a relationship of work and love. Opening Dec. 1. (Cinema Village.)

THE NATIVITY STORY
Catherine Hardwicke ("Thirteen") directed; Keisha Castle-Hughes stars as Mary. Opening Dec. 1. (In wide release.)

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

10 ITEMS OR LESS
A comedy about an actor (Morgan Freeman) who befriends a grocery clerk (Paz Vega). Directed by Brad Silberling. Opening Dec. 1. (IFC Center.)

3 NEEDLES
A three-part drama about the spread of H.I.V. in China, Canada, and Africa. Directed by Thom Fitzgerald; starring Lucy Liu and Chloë Sevigny. Opening Dec. 1. (Village East Cinemas.)

TURISTAS
In this horror film, three young Americans in Brazil (Josh Duhamel, Olivia Wilde, and Beau Garrett) are lured into a dangerous mountain retreat. Directed by John Stockwell. Opening Dec. 1. (In wide release.)

VAN WILDER: THE RISE OF TAJ
Kal Penn stars as Taj in this comedy about a party animal at a British university. Directed by Mort Nathan. Opening Dec. 1. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BABEL
Alejandro González Iñárritu creates savagely beautiful and heartbreaking images, he gets fearless performances out of his actors, he edits with the sharpest razor inside any computer in Hollywood, and he also abuses his audience with a humorless fatalism and a piling up of calamities that border on the ludicrous. "Babel" is set in Morocco, Tokyo, and both Southern California and northern Mexico. The movie has three stories—all touching on relationships between parents and children—which have been arbitrarily linked together by the will of the director and his collaborator, the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. Their theme is the pathos of ignorance. All over the world, terrible things are happening, and we cannot know them or feel them, but an eagle-eyed artist, as he spans the globe, can connect us. As a mood, this globalized empathy is a noble enterprise. As a method of constructing a movie, it's hopeless. With Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett as a couple that gets in trouble in Morocco, Adriana Barraza as their housekeeper and nanny back home with the kids in San Diego, and Rinko Kikuchi as a teen-age girl in Tokyo desperate for the embrace of a man. In French, English, Spanish, Japanese, Berber, and Arabic.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/30/06.) (In wide release.)

BOBBY
In Emilio Estevez's film, Senator Robert F. Kennedy is seen in newsreels and occasionally from the rear as a figure moving through the old Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on the night of his assassination, June 4, 1968. Yet "Bobby" is devoted not to him but to such things as the marital difficulties of the hotel's hair stylist (Sharon Stone) and manager (William H. Macy), the soft meanderings of two retired gents in the lobby (Anthony Hopkins and Harry Belafonte), the psychedelic misadventures of a pair of truant campaign workers (Brian Geraghty and Shia LaBeouf), and many other little tales, starring Demi Moore, Estevez himself, Christian Slater, Heather Graham, Martin Sheen, Helen Hunt, Elijah Wood, and several others. The intersecting stories are meant to suggest the range of American character types, from base to noble, and also the conflicting feelings of vanity, fear, and idealism that Bobby Kennedy might have reconciled and harmonized in a Presidential campaign. But Estevez's script never rises above earnest banality. And didn't anyone suggest to him that you can't throw a movie-celebrity party about an assassination?—*D.D.* (11/27/06) (In wide release.)

BORAT
Somewhere inside the sound and fury that have shrouded this project is a short, gross, and very funny series of sketches, lightly knotted together into a modern picaresque. Sacha Baron Cohen, the British performer behind Ali G, brings his yet-more-notorious invention, the Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev, to the United States, where his shameless curiosity, not to mention a reckless indifference to political correctness, is designed to cause maximum offense. The plot, if you can call it that, demands that Borat travel across the country to find Pamela Anderson: a noble quest, even if it does mean putting that distinguished actress in a sack. Some of the time, our hero is accompanied by his manager, Azamat (Ken Davitian), and also by a live bear, although Azamat looks more like a bear than the bear does. There are jokes thrown at Jews, African-Americans, rodeo fans, homosexuals, and, for good measure, the rest of the population. The smart explanation for this is that Baron Cohen, who is Jewish himself, is assaulting intolerance wherever he finds it; what he cannot control is the fate of the film itself, and one wonders whether, to a late-night college audience, say, the irony behind Borat would be of much concern. Could the movie become a safety valve, encouraging its fans to let off steam?—*Anthony Lane* (11/6/06) (In wide release.)

THE BOWERY
The director Raoul Walsh, born in 1887, infused this rowdy comedy with his memories of the roughhouse New York of the Gay Nineties. Chuck Connors (Wallace Beery), the stout, glad-handing king of the Bowery, runs its gaudiest saloon but is outsmarted at every turn by the slim, suave gambler Steve Brodie (George Raft), who comes up with the ultimate P.R. stunt to steal Connors's thunder—to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge. The race between their two rival volunteer fire brigades to a Mott Street conflagration instantly becomes an epic-scale battle royale. There are sentimental stories involving a refined young woman (Fay Wray) who stumbles unawares onto the street of perdition and the ragamuffin (Jackie Cooper) whom Connors takes in and calls his own; but the casual and constant violence, the drunkenness and gambling, the punished, unkempt bodies, and the mercurial swings between gutter and glory make Walsh's raw, raunchy film the authentic "Gangs of New York." Only someone who was there could have caught the chewy, gimcrack accents, the grotesquely atavistic manners—and the ugly, unquestioned racism, which is repellently prominent from the film's first shot onward. Released in 1933.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Dec. 1-2.)

CASINO ROYALE
James Bond returns in a new incarnation. Much of the debate that preceded this twenty-first installment of 007 revolved around the appointment of Daniel Craig to the leading role; a more pressing question was whether the ailing Bond franchise itself deserved to survive. The solution, as controlled by the direc-

tor Martin Campbell, is to put the narrative on a low-carb diet: no fatty subplots, no indigestible villains, a minimum of frills. Our hero is pure protein, frequently bloodied, and the movie is rich in tenderizing violence; the torture scene, lifted grimly from Ian Fleming's novel, is unfit for younger viewers. The plot requires Bond to outwit Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen), a banker to the world's terrorists; given the film's paucity of gadgets, 007 must rely on his gambling skills, his fists, and the comforting presence of Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), who introduces herself with the words "I'm the money." The movie is ominously long, but, for the first time in many years, we are steered away from silliness toward Fleming's vision of a bitter and undependable world. With Judi Dench as M.—*A.L.* (11/20/06) (In wide release.)

DVD NOTES
MOTHER OF ALL STORIES

Nothing starts a fight like a new slant on old-time religion, and Jean-Luc Godard's **"Hail Mary"** (New Yorker Video), which transplanted the story of the Virgin Birth to modern-day Switzerland (with Mary working at her father's gas station and Joseph as a taxi-driver), caused an uproar when it was released, in 1985. Theatres showing the film in France were vandalized, Christians around the world rose up in protest, Pope John Paul II inveighed against it, thousands of demonstrators picketed its American première at the New York Film Festival, and its American distributor dropped the film.

The main complaint was that the movie shows Mary—or rather, Myriem Roussel, the lithe and balletic actress who plays Mary—in the nude, yet these scenes are crucial to Godard's evocation of the Biblical story as a plausible modern reality. In a sequence dramatizing Joseph's struggle to accept the chaste love that Mary demands, she shows him the body that he may not touch, and he looks upon it with reverence and awe. Godard also invokes Mary's sense of her own body in a Freudian theme he derived from the Gospels: her torment over the abstract incest of having been impregnated (or, as Luke says, "overshadowed") by God. A subplot about a Czech professor in exile for teaching intelligent design underlines the main idea. The rapturous views of nature and the man-made world border on the idolatrous in their pure beauty. Instead of conventional images of faith, Godard offers faith in images—the proof that miracles are possible because existence, as he presents it here, is already a miracle.

The most unorthodox religious film of 2006 has surprisingly managed to avoid controversy. In **"Nacho Libre"** (Paramount), the director Jared Hess, who built "Napoleon Dynamite" around a hidden Mormon context, does not leave faith to the imagination—the film's first shot is of a Bible—yet he couches his unusual Christian ideas in a slouching yet blissful comedy that puts them across innocently. The story, set in a Mexican mission, concerns Brother Ignacio (Jack Black), a monk who tries to earn money to feed the resident orphans—and to win the love of a beautiful young nun, Sister Encarnación (Ana de la Reguera)—by becoming a tag-team wrestler. Though Hess finesses whether the love in question is ever consummated, he leaves no doubt that Ignacio is aiming below the rope belt.

With this farcically randy plot, Hess is after nothing less than Catholic-Protestant reconciliation. Ignacio is the son of a Lutheran missionary and a Catholic deacon, and Hess wants to join the virtues of each faith: he likes the idea of the religious order but dislikes celibacy, which prevents the most dedicated Christians from having children to carry on their beliefs. "Nacho Libre" even features a goofball twist on Pascal's wager in favor of faith, involving Ignacio's tag-team partner, an avowed atheist. Being a Jack Black vehicle, it also features fart jokes and pratfalls, but, in Hess's beatific view, everything dished out or taken in the spirit of Christ is holy.

—*Richard Brody*

THE DEPARTED

This merrily vicious and violent Martin Scorsese film about cops and gangsters in Boston will never haunt your sleep, as "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull" do, but it will keep you excited and amused for well over two hours. A South Boston mobster (Jack Nicholson) recruits a young neighborhood kid and later places him, as a grownup (played by Matt Damon), in the Massachusetts State Police; the police, in turn, place their own undercover guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the crime boss's outfit. It's a double-mole story in which the two moles, in the end, wind up hunting each other. "The Departed" is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs," directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of a Hong Kong movie. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the story by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. Nicholson doesn't seem to take the movie very seriously—he has a ball singing Irish ditties and making rat faces and holding up severed hands—but everyone else is both disciplined and highly adept at delivering the foulmouthed idiom.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

FAST FOOD NATION

Eric Schlosser's 2001 book "Fast Food Nation" was a scathing look at the way McDonald's, Burger King, and other chains have affected the culture and morale, as well as the diet and health, of the United States. The fiction that Schlosser and the director Richard Linklater have created out of the book is pretty much a mess, with narrative lines that go astray or simply wind up in the air and sizable blocks of verbal exposition in which one character or another holds forth on the sins of the meatpackers or the restaurants themselves. The most important plotline is devoted to some attractive young Mexicans who illegally cross the border and wind up exploited in a huge slaughterhouse in Cody, Colorado. The scenes of the abattoir are disturbing, in the tradition of Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," but the movie is fragmentary and unrealized. With Greg Kinnear, Wilmer Valderrama, Catalina Sandino Moreno, and Bobby Cannavale.—*D.D.* (11/27/06) (In wide release.)

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE FOUNTAIN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE HISTORY BOYS

This adaptation of Alan Bennett's effervescent play comes alive on the screen. The setting is Yorkshire in the nineteen-eighties—a grammar school at which a group of eight boys, seven of them very bright, are being prepped for mind-crushing exams that could lead to a place to read history at Oxford or Cambridge. No actual classrooms could ever have been as animated as these: the boys talk back to their teachers, and everyone seems familiar with the details of everyone else's private life. Bennett's conceit is that the classroom is a theatre in which learning is acquired as much by performance as by study. There, wit is a form of action, and music and poetry create and release emotions too private to be spoken. The two principal teachers are Hector (Richard Griffiths), a sixtyish humanist who believes in educating souls, and his antagonist, Irwin (Stephen Campbell Moore), a slick new man, who teaches clever exam-taking skills. With Dominic Cooper as Dakin, the cunning, dark-eyed seducer, and Samuel Barnett as the smooth-cheeked Posner, physically younger than the other boys and hopelessly in love with Dakin. Posner sings Rodgers and Hart ballads; he's like a Shakespearian boy actor offering plaintive Elizabethan ballads in the interludes between action.—*D.D.* (11/27/06) (In wide release.)

THE QUEEN

The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales, in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

STRANGER THAN FICTION

The existence of Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) is of no interest, even to Harold Crick. He works for the Internal Revenue Service, never takes vacations, and always cleans his teeth with the same number of brushstrokes. His life is described to us, in crisp female voice-over; little by little, we realize that Harold himself is listening to the voice, and that he is something even worse than dull. He is fictional, the character in a novel, and the narrator is in fact his creator, Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson), who is trying to find a way to kill him off. Moviegoers already exhausted by "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation" may wince at such a conceit, but the screenwriter, Zach Helm, and the director, Marc Forster, pull it off—they actually work through the comic implications of the setup, including the idea that it may not turn out funny after all. (Harold is devastated when he reads the manuscript of his story and understands that, in the name of art, he must indeed expire.) Dustin Hoffman is in relaxed and winning form as the literature professor to whom the hero takes his problem, and Maggie Gyllenhaal is the free spirit who thaws his iced-up heart. The ending may be mush, but the rest of Forster's movie has surprising bite.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT

Despite the self-abasing shtick of Stepin Fetchit, this rustic comic drama by John Ford, from 1953, may be Hollywood's most complex view of race relations. Set in Fairfield, Kentucky, in 1905, it weaves together several stories that lay bare the unhealed wounds of the Civil War and the unreconstructed Southern attitudes that made segregation the law and lynching the horrific custom. An elderly local judge, William Priest (Charles Winninger), a laconic, folksy figure whose courtroom observes the spirit rather than the letter of the law, faces a tough reëlection campaign against Horace K. Maydew, the high-handed son of a carpetbagger who represents the local gentry. Priest doesn't do himself any good when he faces down a lynch mob at the jailhouse door and sees to the funeral of a prostitute; but the procession of white folk that arrives at an African-American church where the parishioners mourn the fallen woman with sweet dirges is downright Clintonesque, and foretells the changes in American society in the nineteen-fifties and beyond.

With Ludwig Stössel as a German-Jewish storekeeper, Arleen Whelan as a belle with a mysterious past, and John Russell as a spirited young squire who loves her.—*R.B.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Nov. 29.)

VOLVER
The new film from Pedro Almodóvar stars Penélope Cruz as Raimunda, who is soon seen mopping up the blood of her murdered husband—slain by her daughter, whom he tried to abuse—and stashing him in a freezer. This being Almodóvar, such horrors have a jaunty edge, and the colors (red gore against blue floor) are picked out with an unembarrassed eye. The story is more or less a male-free zone, and any other director would be chastised for training his camera so devotedly on a succession of cleavages. We follow Raimunda's timid sister (Lola Dueñas) as she mourns her aunt (Chus Lampreave) and then takes up, quite happily, with the ghost of her dead mother (Carmen Maura). Misfortune has befallen every generation, yet the victims are more resigned than surprised, as if, like the cheery local hooker (María Isabel Díaz), they know all men are traitors to begin with. Hitchcockians will warm to the credit sequence, which could be by Saul Bass, and to the score, which shimmers with echoes of Bernard Herrmann; even Hitchcock, however, might have balked at the level of emotional control that Almodóvar exerts upon his characters. You feel yourself gripped by a beautiful machine, engineered for the finest melodrama. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (11/6/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

COME EARLY MORNING: In wide release. **HAPPY FEET:** In wide release. **LET'S GO TO PRISON:** In wide release. **THE RETURN:** In wide release. **THIS FILTHY WORLD:** Cinema Village.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Through Dec. 6: African Diaspora Film Festival. Selected screenings. Dec. 1 at 4: "Summer Wedding" (2004, Moktar Ladjimi; in Arabic). ♦ Dec. 2 at 9:30: "Live and Become" (2005, Radu Mihaileanu; in Hebrew, French, and Amharic), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Dec. 3 at 9: "Days of Glory" (2006, Rachid Bouchareb; in French). (For complete program information, go to www.nyadff.org.)

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Give Thanks for John Ford." Nov. 29 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Sun Shines Bright" (†). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein. ♦ "Czech Modernism." Except where noted, all films are in Czech. Nov. 30 at 7: "The Kreutzer Sonata" (1926, Gustav Machatý; silent). ♦ Dec. 1 at 9:15: "The Strike" (1947, Karel Steklý). ♦ Dec. 3 at 4:30 and 9:15: "From Saturday to Sunday" (1931, Machatý). ♦ Dec. 3 at 6:50: "Tonka of the Gallows" (1930, Karel Anton). ♦ "The *Village Voice* Film Guide." Dec. 4 at 4:30 and 7: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a panel discussion with the film critics J. Hoberman, Jonas Mekas, and Andrew Sarris, moderated by Dennis Lim.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 29-30 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" (1966, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Through Dec. 21: "Fox Before the Code," films from 1930-35. Dec. 1-2 at 1, 4:20, and 7:45: "The Bowery" (†). ♦ Dec. 1-2 at 2:45, 6:10, and 9:30: "Me and My Gal" (1932, Raoul Walsh). ♦ Dec. 3 at 1:20, 4:40, and 8: "Hoopla" (1933, Frank Lloyd). ♦ Dec. 3 at 3:10 and 6:30: "Goldie" (1931, Ben Stoloff). ♦ Dec. 4 at 1:20, 4:30, and 7:40: "Broadway Through a Keyhole" (1933, Lowell Sherman). ♦ Dec. 4 at 3:10, 6:20, and 9:30: "Advice to the Lovelorn" (1933, Alfred Werker). ♦ Dec. 5 at 2, 5:30, and 8:50: "Common Clay" (1930, Victor Fleming).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Jacques Audiard. Dec. 5 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Venus Beauty Institute" (1999, Tonie Marshall; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Essential Art House: 50 Years of Janus Films." Nov. 29-30: "Cleo from 5 to 7" (1961, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ New York International Children's Film Festival. Nov. 30 at 6 and Dec. 2-3 at 11 A.M.: "Azur and Asmar" (2006, Michel Ocelot; in French), introduced by the director. ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Dec. 1-2: "Lost Highway" (1997, David Lynch).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving," films from the museum's collection. Nov. 29 at 4: "His Girl Friday" (1940, Howard Hawks). ♦ The films of Norman McLaren. Nov. 29 at 6 and Nov. 30 at 8:30: A short-film program, including "Blinkity Blank" (1955). ♦ Through Dec. 31: "Made in NY." Nov. 29 at 8: "Broadway Danny Rose" (1984, Woody Allen). ♦ Through Dec. 22: The films of Roberto Rossellini. Except where noted, all films are in Italian. Nov. 29 at 6:15: "The Machine That Kills Bad People" (1945-52). ♦ Nov. 29 at 8:15: "Desire" (1943-46, Rossellini and Marcello Pagliero). ♦ Nov. 30 at 6: "Blaise Pascal" (1971). ♦ Nov. 30 at 8:30: "India" (1958; in Italian and various Indian dialects). ♦ Dec. 2 at 8: "Fear" (1954; in English). ♦ Dec. 3 at 5:30 and Dec. 4 at 6: "Viva l'Italia (Garibaldi)" (1960). ♦ Dec. 4 at 8:30: An illustrated lecture by Tag Gallagher, Rossellini's biographer. ♦ Through Dec. 31: Films produced by Walter Mirisch. Dec. 1 at 6:30: "In the Heat of the Night" (1967, Norman Jewison), introduced by Mirisch. ♦ Dec. 2 at 6: "Man of the West" (1958, Anthony Mann). ♦ Dec. 3 at 1: "Some Like It Hot" (1959, Billy Wilder). ♦ Dec. 3 at 3:15: "The Landlord" (1970, Hal Ashby).

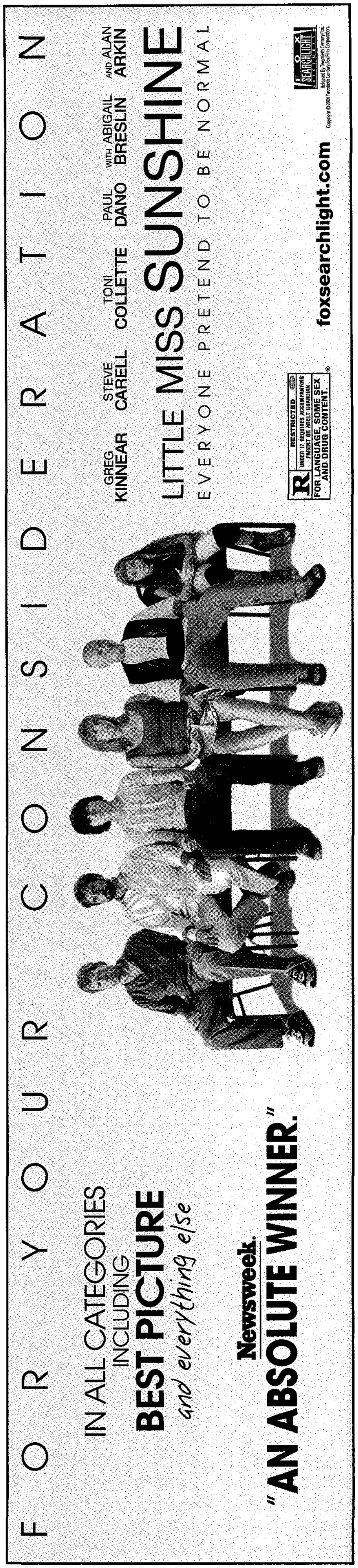
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Alejandro González Iñárritu. Dec. 1 at 7:30: "Babel" (2006; in French, English, Spanish, Japanese, Berber, and Arabic), introduced by the director. ♦ Through Dec. 31: The films of Jacques Rivette. All films are in French. Dec. 2 at 2: "Le Pont du Nord" (1981). ♦ Dec. 2 at 5: "Love on the Ground" (1984). ♦ Dec. 2 at 7:30: "Wuthering Heights" (1985). ♦ Dec. 3 at 4:30: "L'Amour Fou" (1969), introduced by the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Nov. 30-Dec. 5: "Invisible" (2006, Adam Watstein). ♦ Films from Croatia. Nov. 30 at 7: "See You" (1995, Ivan Salaj; in Croatian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ *Midnight*." Dec. 1-2: "Newsies" (1992, Kenny Ortega).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Classics." Dec. 3 and Dec. 5 at 4:30: "Andrei Rublev" (1966, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Austrian films. All films are in German. Nov. 29 at 2:30 and Nov. 30 at 9: "Struggle" (2003, Ruth Mader). ♦ Nov. 29 at 6:30 and Nov. 30 at 4: "Slumming" (2006, Michael Glawogger). ♦ Dec. 1 at noon and Dec. 3 at 3:15: "Elsewhere" (2001, Nikolaus Geyrhalter). ♦ Dec. 1 at 4:40 and Dec. 2 at 5: "Zorro's Bar Mitzvah" (2005, Ruth Beckermann). ♦ Dec. 1 at 8:30: "The Castle" (1997, Michael Haneke). ♦ Dec. 3 at 8: "Models" (1997, Ulrich Seidl). ♦ "Independents Night." Nov. 30 at 6:30: "Kabul Transit" (2006, David Edwards, Gregory Whitmore, and Maliha Zulfacar). ♦ In première. Dec. 2 at 7:30: "Inland Empire" (2006, David Lynch), introduced by the director.



READINGS AND TALKS

"PUNISHMENT: THE U.S. RECORD"
This two-day conference at the New School considering the consequences of incarceration includes an appearance by Richard Gere and his wife, Carey Lowell, who will read prisoners' writings on Nov. 30 at 6. There will also be lectures and discussions by such academics, writers, lawyers, and advocates as Mark Dow (the author of "American Gulag"), Jeremy Travis (a former director of the National Institute of Justice), Nancy Gertner (a U.S. district-court judge), and Marc Mauer (the executive director of the Sentencing Project). (66 W. 12th St. 212-229-5776, ext. 3121. Nov. 30 from 10:30 to 7 and Dec. 1 from 10 to 7.)

ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK
The institute is sponsoring a three-night lecture series featuring Italian academics and writers. The series starts on Dec. 1 with a panel covering computer translations, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence that includes an American, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Douglas Hofstadter, along with the mathematician Piergiorgio Odifreddi and the neuroscientist Tommaso Poggio. The subsequent events, on Dec. 5 and Dec. 6, apply humor to logical and philosophical problems and consider the invention of God, respectively. (686 Park Ave., between 68th and 69th Sts. 212-879-4242. All events are at 6.)

"HANNAH ARENDT RIGHT NOW"
Rony Brauman, Walter Mosley, Azar Nafisi, Samantha Power, and other writers convene at the behest of the New York Institute for the Humanities for a two-day symposium on the legacy of the German political philosopher to mark the centennial of her birth. (Cantor Film Center, 38 E. 8th St. For more information, call 212-998-2100. Dec. 2-3, starting at 10 A.M.)

STELLA ADLER STUDIO OF ACTING
The critic Harold Bloom introduces the poets Henri Cole and Martha Serpas, who will read from their work. (31 W. 27th St., 3rd fl. 212-689-0087. Dec. 4 at 7.)

"READING BETWEEN A AND B"
The poets Jean Valentine, Suzanne Gardinier, and Kate Greenstreet read from their work at the 11th Street Bar, in the East Village. (510 E. 11th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
The society celebrates the seventieth anniversary of the publishing house New Directions, with readings by Forrest Gander, Edward Hirsch, Marie Ponsot, Philip Levine, Bei Dao, Susan Howe, Penelope Creeley, and others. (The New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BOOK FAIR
For nearly two decades, small publishers have been gathering annually to display their wares and talk shop. This year, more than a hundred and fifty independent presses are participating, and the many public events include everything from an interview with the writer Michael Cunningham to discussions about political blogs, chick lit, and graffiti. (The Small Press Center, the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, 20 W. 44th St. Dec. 2-3. For more information, visit www.smallpress.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The American anomie evoked in Edward Hopper's paintings is the inevitable postwar counterpart to the fundamental optimism of Norman Rockwell's prelapsarian world. Both are represented at **Sotheby's** sale of American art (Nov. 29): Hopper's painting "Hotel Window" depicts a lone figure in a cold, monumental lobby, while Rockwell's characteristically warm "Breaking Home Ties" speaks of the contrast between the excitement of youth and the wistfulness of old age. An auction of sporting art follows on Nov. 30, which includes equestrian and racing paintings; later the same day, the house will present maritime paintings from the collection of Peter V. Guarisco. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** covers much the same territory, with an auction of American art (Nov. 30) that features works by Cassatt and Sargent (a portrait of the socialite Mildred Carter) and a wonderful winter scene by Grandma Moses that once hung above Cole Porter's piano. Next comes a sale of sporting art (Dec. 1), with a selection topped by a picture of the Streatlam Stud, an elegant horse shown with his mares and progeny in an equine family portrait (set in an English landscape) by John Frederick Herring, Sr. A page with the lyrics to the Beatles song "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," written in ballpoint pen by Paul McCartney, and one of Jimi Hendrix's guitars are two bits of the stardust on offer at the house's sale of rock and pop memorabilia (Dec. 4). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The people behind **Phillips's** "Saturday @ Phillips" sales like to think that they have something for everyone, and in that spirit their Dec. 2 auction offers works on paper, jewelry, photographs, and vintage fashion, including a witty dress designed by Isaac Mizrahi, decorated with paillettes made from recycled 7-Up cans. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

A revival of Brian Friel's drama "Translations."

JASHAR AWAN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
KEEPING SCORES
Dec. 16-Jan. 17

Movie music is most noticeable when it's bad; the good scores may pass by largely unnoticed, but they help make the films themselves memorable. Franz Waxman's music adorned some of the best—the first American films by Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock, "Fury" and "Rebecca," and Billy Wilder's "Sunset Blvd." MOMA is showing the films in a monthlong series devoted to the composer. (212-708-9400.)

ART
TIME CAPSULE
Dec. 19-April 29

In November of 1922, Howard Carter discovered the entrance to the tomb of Tutankhamen in the Valley of the Kings. The photographer Harry Burton was also in Egypt at the time, as part of a Metropolitan Museum expedition, and he jumped teams to help Carter document his extraordinary find. Later this month, the Met will present Burton's photographs of the opening of the tomb, and the first documentation of what was found inside. (212-535-7710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
YULETIDE SOUNDS
Dec. 24 and Dec. 28

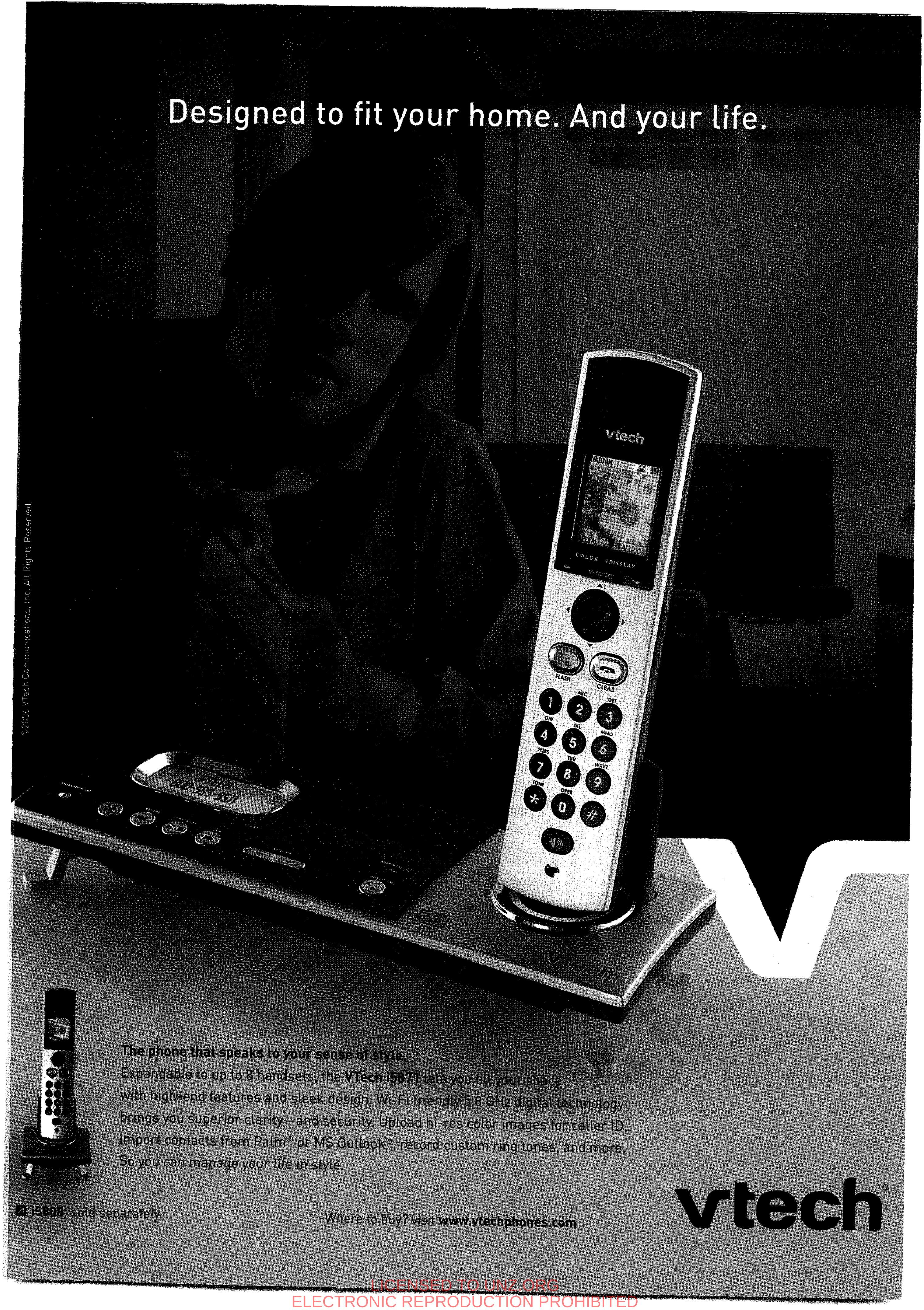
The annual concerts of the New York String Orchestra, a convocation of young virtuosos gathered by the violinist Jaime Laredo, are among Carnegie Hall's most hallowed holiday traditions. This year its guest artists are the violinist Jennifer Koh and the pianist Leon Fleisher. (212-247-7800.)

THE THEATRE
THE IRE IN IRISH
Jan. 4

Brian Friel's drama "Translations" was first performed in 1980. Manhattan Theatre Club revives the play, about clashing cultures in the fictional Irish county of Ballybeg circa 1833. Garry Hynes directs. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
MANY HATS
Jan. 17

Lincoln Center's "American Songbook" series kicks off the New Year with an appearance by the rapper, actor, and crooner Mos Def, who will be leading a jazz big band. (212-721-6500.)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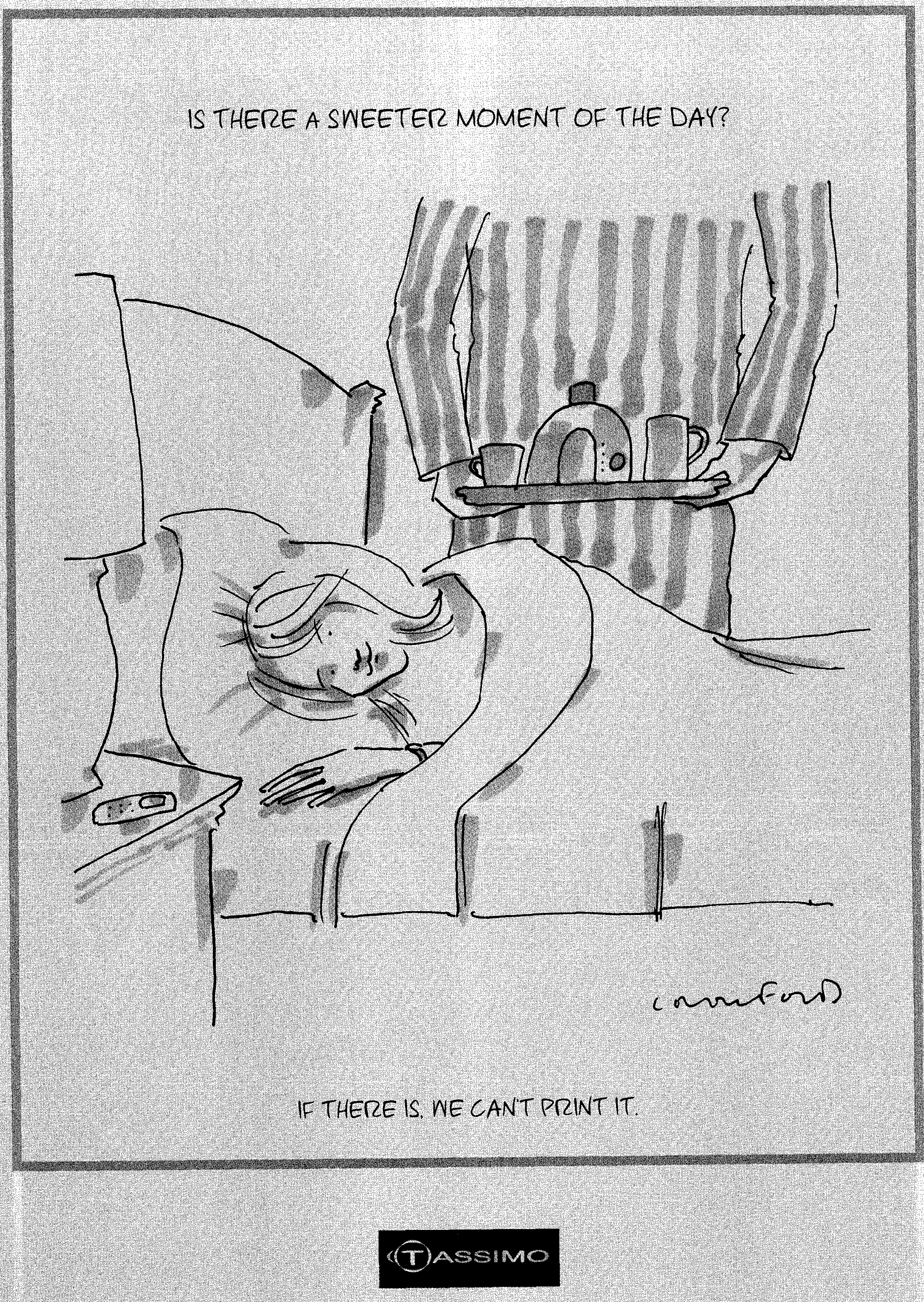
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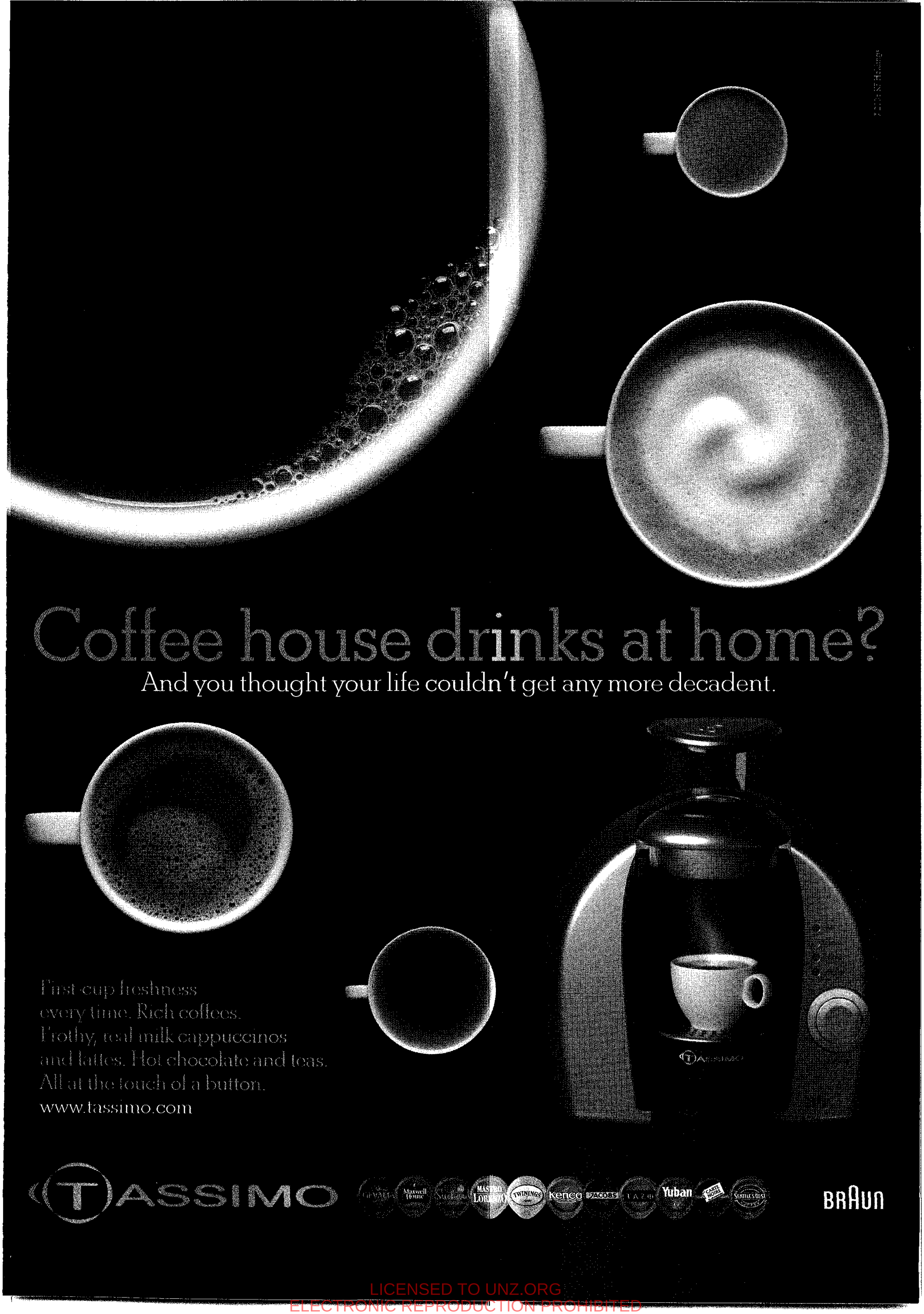

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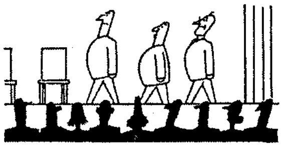
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

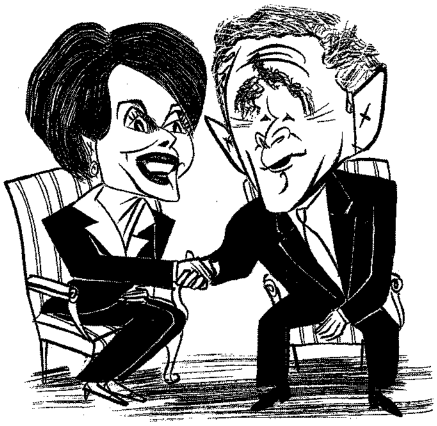
IT'S HIS BIPARTY



According to the "Backwards Bush" countdown clock, available on the Web and in key-chain and desk-accessory form at selected novelty and toy stores around the nation, the sitting Administration in Washington will, as of this writing, be in office for another seven hundred and eighty-nine days, five hours, twenty-three minutes, and 36.2 seconds. But, if present trends continue, it's going to feel like forever. On November 8th, the day after the mid-term election, President Bush vowed to "find common ground," "work with the new Congress in a bipartisan way," and "overcome the temptation to divide this country between red and blue." By way of launching "a new era of coöperation," he announced a personnel change: Donald Rumsfeld was out as Secretary of Defense, to be replaced by Robert Gates, widely viewed as a member of the reality-based community. A day later, on November 9th, Bush had Nancy Pelosi, the incoming Speaker of the House, over for a nice lunch and an Oval Office photo op. "We've had a—I would call it a very constructive and very friendly conversation," the President said, graciously. "We both extended the hand of friendship," the Speaker-designate replied, graciously. "Thank you all," the President concluded. Graciously.

While they were having lunch, the White House Press Office dropped the news that the nomination of John R. Bolton "to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary," had been resubmitted to the Senate. The new era of coöperation may or may not be definitively dead, but at the moment it appears to have been not so much an era as a news cycle.

The first time that John R. Bolton's name was sent up to Capitol Hill, in March of last year, the nomination got nowhere, even though the Senate was in Republican hands. The Administration waited till Congress adjourned and then gave him a recess appointment, which will expire in January. Bolton is by all accounts a clever and energetic fellow, but cleverness is not competence, and energy can amplify vice as readily as virtue.



At the U.N., Bolton has earned a reputation—in the not very diplomatic words of sixty-four former American Ambassadors and diplomats who recently signed a letter opposing him—for "egotistical intolerance," "arrogant actions," and a "hard-core, go-it-alone posture" that "has alienated the bulk of the diplomatic community and cost the United States its leadership role." ("With so much at stake, our country cannot afford to permit John Bolton to continue his destructive course during the next two years," the diplomats wrote.) "He has succeeded in putting almost everyone's backs up, even among some of America's closest allies," last week's issue of *The Economist* quotes a "senior Western diplomat" as saying. To put it another way, the man's resemblance to Yosemite Sam does not end with the mustache.

There is little chance that the lame-duck Senate will confirm Bolton and no chance that the new one will. So the Administration is toying with the idea of giving him another recess appointment (which would enable him to keep the job without drawing the salary) or naming him to a deputy position without filling the top spot (which would enable him to stay on as "acting" Ambassador without the extraordinary and plenipotentiary title). Nor is the renomination of Bolton the only personnel-related sign that Bush's commitment to comity may have already peaked. On November 14th, the President renominated Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, a former editor-in-chief of *Reader's Digest* and a close friend of Karl

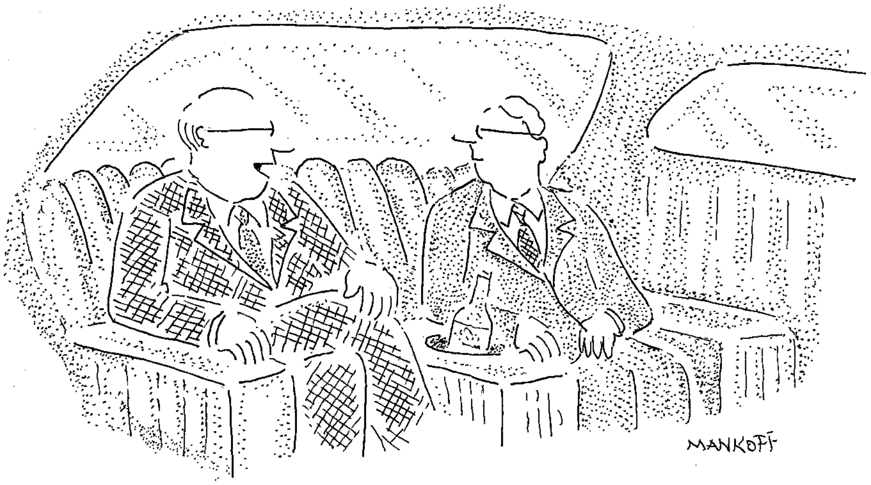
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Rove, to be chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which supervises the Voice of America and other government radio and television operations aimed at overseas audiences. Never mind that last summer the State Department's inspector general found that, among other antics, Tomlinson used his office to support a "horse racing operation" (he owns thoroughbreds), or that a year ago he had to resign from the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting after *that* agency's inspector general caught him violating rules meant to protect public broadcasting from political meddling. On November 15th, the President renominated four of his hardest-right candidates for the federal courts of appeals: a Defense Department lawyer who has been denounced by a score of retired generals and admirals for his role as an architect of the Administration's infamous interrogation regime; a former Interior Department attorney and mining and ranching lobbyist who sees the Clean Water Act as "regulatory excess"; a district-court judge whose decisions have been reversed or vacated more than a hundred and fifty times, an astounding record that includes two reversals from the Supreme Court—one of them in a unanimous opinion written by Justice Clarence Thomas—in voting-rights cases; and a former aide to Senator Trent Lott who is the first federal-appeals-court nominee in a quarter of a century to be unanimously rated "not qualified" by the American Bar Association.

Finally (or maybe not so finally), on November 16th, Bush appointed one Eric Keroack to be the new chief of "population affairs" at the Department of Health and Human Services. In this post, Dr. Keroack, a gynecologist, will oversee what is called Title X, a Nixon-era program that distributes contraceptives to poor or uninsured women. Until recently, he was the medical director of a Christianist pregnancy-counselling organization that regards the distribution of contraceptives as "demeaning to women." One of his odder theories makes him a sort of family-friendly version of General Jack D. Ripper. In Keroack's case, the precious bodily fluid of concern is the hormone oxytocin, a.k.a. "God's Super Glue." Apparently, oxytocin is released during certain enjoyable activities, including hugging, massage, and, of course, sex. It is also, according to Keroack, the fluid that keeps married couples bound to each other. Therefore, if a young woman squanders her supply on too much fooling around, she can forget about ever becoming a committed wife. Keroack's appointment, unlike the others, does not, alas, require Senate confirmation.

Perhaps what we are seeing is one last White House attempt to reënergize the legendary "base," after which the new era of coöperation will resume. Or perhaps the President has simply reverted to type. Last week, he found himself in Vietnam, where the United States once fought a big, bloody, disastrous war of choice. In Hanoi, which under its nominally Communist rulers is more vibrantly capitalist than Ho Chi Minh City ever was when it was called Saigon, he was asked if the American experience in Vietnam offered any guidance about Iraq. "One lesson is that we tend to want there to be instant success in the world, and the task in Iraq is going to take a while," he replied, and added, "We'll succeed unless we quit." What did he mean? That the peaceable, bustling, unthreatening (if unfree) Vietnam of today represents an American success, made possible by the fact that we didn't quit until fifty-eight thousand Americans and three million Vietnamese were dead? Or that it represents an American failure, which would have been averted by another decade of war, another fifty-eight thousand, another three million? Who knows? And who knows, really, what this President has been taught by this month's election? The present President Bush, after all, is a decider of decisions, not a learner of lessons. And he likes to decide that he was right all along.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"I've been rich and I've been super-rich. Super-rich is better."

SECOND ACTS
THE GHOSTWRITER

In 1994, Pablo Fenjves lived in a house about sixty yards away from Nicole Brown Simpson's residence, at 875 South Bundy Drive, in Brentwood. Fenjves was a screenwriter, and on the night of June 12th of that year he was working on a script called "The Last Bachelor," about an amorous baseball player. Shortly before eleven o'clock, he went from his office to his bedroom, where his wife, Jai, was watching "Dynasty: The Reunion." As the credits for the program were rolling, Fenjves heard a dog barking. The sound of the dog, Fenjves later testified, was like "a plaintive wail—sounded like a, you know, a very unhappy animal." Seven months before the murders of Simpson and Ron Goldman, Fenjves had written a script called "Frame-Up," which became a cable-television movie. In the opening scene, Fenjves wrote, "We hear the plaintive wail of a police siren."

The son of Holocaust survivors from Hungary, Fenjves had followed a circuitous route to "the Bundy location," as it was known in the O. J. Simpson trial. He

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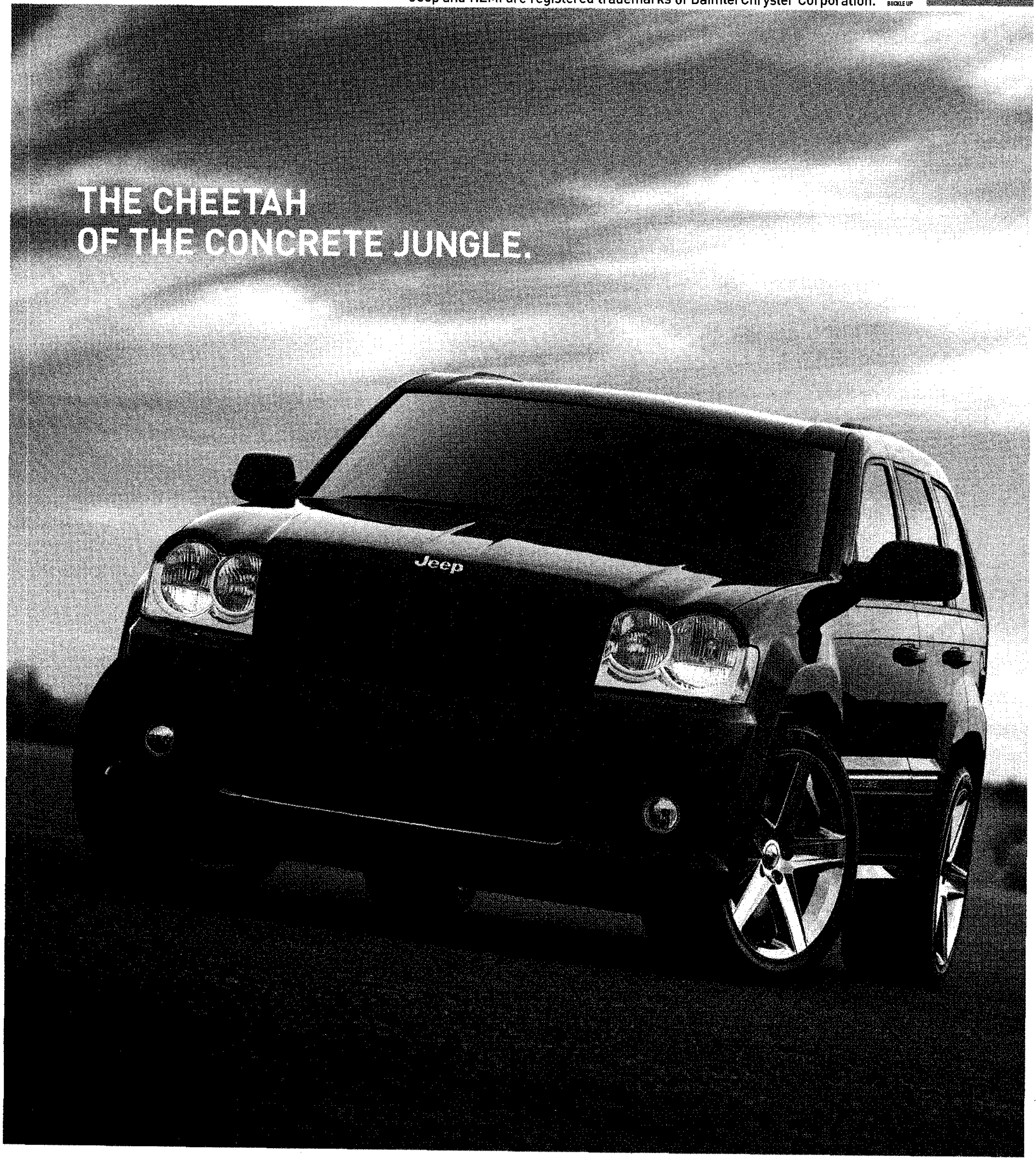

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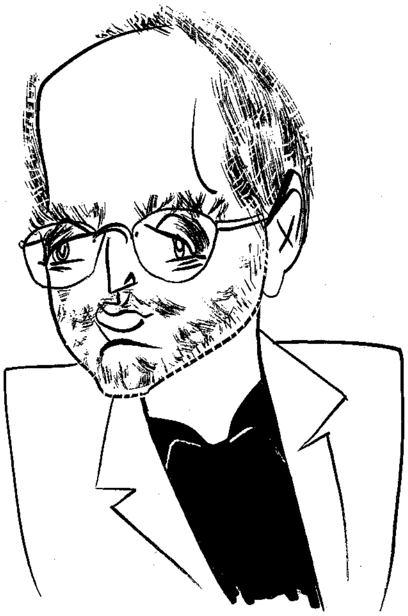
grew up in Venezuela, went to college in Illinois, and ventured to Canada for a first job in journalism. In the late nineteen-seventies, he moved to Florida to write what he called "human-interest stories" for the *National Enquirer*. There he covered such curiosities as the world's oldest Siamese twins (they were in their twenties and worked in a travelling freak show), but he soon decided to devote himself to screenwriting full time.



Pablo Fenjves

While at the *Enquirer*, he became close friends with a colleague at the paper, Judith Regan. They kept in touch over the years, and when Regan became a success in the publishing world, as the custodian of her own imprint at HarperCollins, she sometimes hired Fenjves. He ghostwrote the 2003 autobiography, "Maybe You Never Cry Again," of the comedian Bernie Mac (sample passage: "Got-damn right muh'fucka, I got a level of crazy in me you ain't begun to see"). Last year, Regan published Fenjves's parody of James Frey's work, called "A Million Little Lies," which he wrote under the name James Pinocchio. All the while, Fenjves kept up with his screenwriting, providing the story for such films as "The Devil's Child," which was summarized by a leading Internet movie database as "A young woman's mother wants her to bear Satan's child."

Not long ago, Regan approached Fenjves with an offer to serve as O. J. Simpson's ghostwriter for the book that would become "If I Did It"—an account that apparently included a hypothetical confession to the crime by the acquitted defendant. Fenjves accepted. "I think you'd be hard pressed to find a reporter in this country who, given the opportunity to sit down and take a confession from O. J. Simpson, no matter how oblique, would have refused to do so," he said last week, over the telephone. "It wasn't a moral issue with me."

Last Monday, Rupert Murdoch, the chairman of News Corp., the parent company of HarperCollins, abruptly cancelled the book, along with Regan's broadcast interview with Simpson, both of which had been scheduled for release this week. "I and senior management agree with the American public that this was an ill-considered project," Murdoch said in a statement.

Having lived through the first O.J. frenzy, Fenjves seemed unruffled by the recent developments. He is now divorced from Jai, but he still lives with his son in the house where he heard the barking of the unhappy Akita, named Kato. (At the trial, Fenjves and several other "dog witnesses," as they were known, testified as part of an attempt by the prosecution to pinpoint the time of the murders.)

Fenjves believes that, in the wake of Murdoch's decision to cancel the book, another publisher may seek to release it. (Michael Viner, whose small press enjoyed success in the first Simpson era with the works of Faye Resnick, a friend of Nicole's, said he had no interest in "If I Did It." "This is the equivalent of a snuff movie," he said.)

Still, Fenjves is undaunted. "It's going to be bigger than ever," he said. "It's like 'Ulysses,' except without the talent."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

DEPT. OF PRESERVATION
STILL MODERN

Philip Johnson's Glass House, which is actually a compound of fourteen structures on a rolling hillside in New Canaan, Connecticut, is one of the most photographed pieces of twentieth-century architecture. But when the new executive director of the property, Christy MacLear, started work last summer she discovered that the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which now owns the house and will open it as a museum next year, didn't have the right to use any of the pictures that filled architecture books. "All the pictures belonged to the photographers, so when Johnson died, last year, he couldn't leave them to us," MacLear said. "I realized we had to take our own."

That explains why MacLear spent two gray, damp days recently traipsing around Johnson's forty-seven acres with Julius Shulman, a ninety-six-year-old architectural photographer from Los Angeles. Shulman is to architectural photographers what Philip Johnson was to architects. Johnson was still going regularly to his office until a couple of years before his death, at ninety-eight, and Shulman seems equally uninterested in slowing down. He is working on two new books, and a month ago he flew to Chicago to photograph a series of postwar modernist buildings. He has been around long enough to see the buildings he likes be the newest thing, fall out of fashion, and come back in again.

"The last time I was here was 1963," Shulman said, as he sat at Johnson's marble dining table, eating a sandwich. "I didn't want to look at my old pictures before coming back. I wanted this to be a brand-new experience." Shulman started out by photographing the Glass House, which was fourteen years old when he last visited, and then went on to photograph the inside and outside of two of Johnson's buildings that he had never seen before: the freestanding library, a curving structure of terra-cotta-colored stucco with a conical top, which Johnson built in 1980, and the angular, white-painted sculpture gallery, of 1970.

MacLear had arranged for a golf cart to get Shulman around the property, but he barely used it. He had brought with him a fold-up metal walker onto which he had Scotch-taped a Mercedes-Benz logo. Each time MacLear offered to get the golf cart, he said, "No, I think I'll take the Mercedes." Shulman decided on a general angle for each photograph, and then dispatched his collaborator, Juergen Nogai, to carry the camera and tripod as Shulman—dressed in an ascot, a blue striped shirt, a vest, and a dark-green Tyrolian jacket—pushed his

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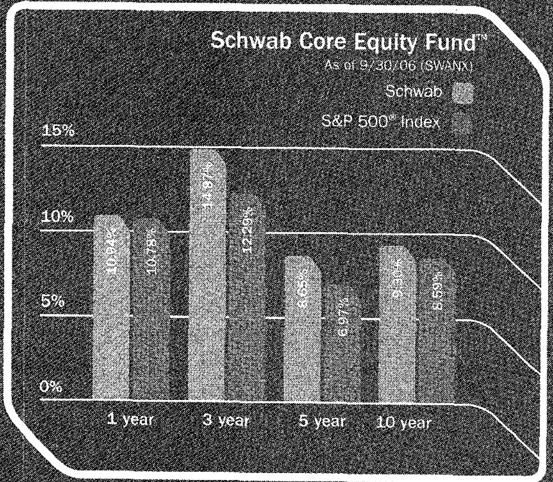

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walker slowly through the tall grass. He was delighted by the fact that the weather was overcast. "This light is magnificent—no shadows," he said. "We are so lucky that the sun isn't out. I want the slogan for all of these pictures to be 'The sky is not blue, but the grass is green.' "

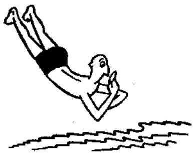
Shulman seems to see modernism as exuberant, not austere. His most famous picture, which shows two elegantly dressed women sitting in a glass-walled house by the architect Pierre Koenig, cantilevered over the lights of Los Angeles, is to mid-century modernism what Monet's paintings are to Gothic cathedrals. He doesn't like the way most architectural photographers shoot empty buildings. "Why is there such a fear of using people?" he said. "Richard Neutra was always furious if I used people in pictures of his houses—he was afraid they would overpower the architecture. But my photographs show babies and cats and dogs and children. Why not? It makes it interesting to connect it with the life."

The Glass House never had much in the way of babies and children, although Johnson and his companion, David Whitney, did have a dog, which is now looked after by Marty Skrelunas, the director of preservation, who lives on-site. Without Johnson and Whitney, who also died in 2005, Shulman put MacLear into a couple of his photographs. But most were simply views of Johnson's compound and its natural setting, often from unusual angles. He photographed the bathroom of the Glass House, which is inside a brick cylinder that rises up through the center of the house, and later he spent a long time staring at the brick cylinder from outside, through the glass. "Why doesn't anyone ever photograph the house from here?" he asked.

By the end of his two-day session, Shulman had taken sixteen pictures. His favorite, he decided, was a view of the Glass House from the entry drive, with a stone wall looming in the foreground and the pristine form of the house set off quietly in the background. "It's how Johnson would always see the house, coming down the driveway, but no one ever photographed it that way," Shulman said. "You know, we have to approach a place like this as if we were children, seeing it for the first time. I do wish Philip Johnson were here—I'd love to show him his house."

—*Paul Goldberger*

MARCH OF PROGRESS
CATCHING AN E-WAVE



Surf cams, which started appearing on the Web in the nineteen-nineties, seemed destined to improve productivity among those surfers with lives and without ocean views. No more slogging to the beach at dawn to see what the waves were doing. No more poring through the vagaries of marine forecasts, or the compound vagaries of drawled messages on phone-line surf reports, where one guy's six feet was another guy's two feet and the information was often a day old. With surf cams, you could go online and look at the waves and know exactly when to drop everything and dash to the coast.

For New York City surfers, this kind of see-for-yourself is especially useful, since it's an hour by car or by train from midtown to the nearest waves, which break off the Rockaways or the beach towns just east of Queens. Jim Nason, who lives and surfs in one of those towns—Long Beach—set up a cam in the window of his beachfront apartment in 1998, after a day when, coming home from his job as a computer programmer in Manhattan, he saw that he had been missing excellent waves all afternoon. "That was it," he recalled recently. "I can get my work done at night if I need to. So the cam was for me, really. But everybody else can check it out, too."

And they do. Surfer Jim, as he is known online, gets fifty thousand hits a month—even more during the high season for local surfing, which is fall, when the hurricane swells arrive. Every six minutes, his cam takes four photographs, a few seconds apart, of the waves at Long Beach and posts them on his Web site.

A common problem for would-be Jims at other beaches is the resentment that local surfers tend to feel when a cam goes up at their break. The cams increase crowds in the water when the surf is good, creating wave scarcity for the regulars. At various spots on the West Coast, cams have been sabotaged, their operators threatened, their franchises shut down. The vibe on Long Island is mellower than that. "I've had guys paddle by me in the water and say, 'Shut down the cam,' but that's about it," Nason said. It's difficult to picture anyone getting too confrontational with him. He has, at forty-three, a boyish face, spiky blond hair, and a huge, disarming grin. He also has shoulders about four feet wide.

Nason was happy, on a recent afternoon, to show off his setup. "Just a regular family video cam," he said, indicating the camera, turned seaward, on a tripod at the window in his living room. "Pinnacle Studio 8 software, comes with a capture card." He pointed to an old computer case under a table. "There's about five different drives in there."

Kids' toys—bikes, trikes, mini-monster trucks—were stacked against the walls. Nason's children—Braeden, who's seven, and Arielle, three—were wrestling in front of the TV. Nason peered at his computer monitor. "Sometimes it will hit some memory error and get stuck," he said. "People say I do it on purpose when the surf's good, but it's not true." He tapped a couple of keys. "My babysitter reset this at, like, one today," he said.

Since Nason's Web site is free—many surf cams require subscriptions—he can be casual about its schedule. "Sometimes, on Saturdays, my kids will get on here to play games, and they'll take down the cam for a couple of hours. But if the surf's good I'll make them get off every forty-five minutes. Give the masses something to look at."

Nason sees himself as running a modest community service. "I get a lot of e-mail from my site," he said. "You know, guys from California, moving to New York, write me in a panic: 'Can I really surf there?' I write back, 'Yeah. You can take your board on the L.I.R.R. Here's what you do.' "

In a far corner of the room stood three or four surfboards. But it was the tchotchkes on the windowsill—the candles, the potted cacti—that caught a visitor's eye. They were all weirdly familiar, and that was because they are what one sees when Nason's kids, playing, knock the camera askew, causing it to study a blurry spider plant for a few hours. And here were the very beige curtains that Nason's wife, Paula, has been known to draw against the afternoon sun, leaving the masses to contemplate their weave.

—*William Finnegan*

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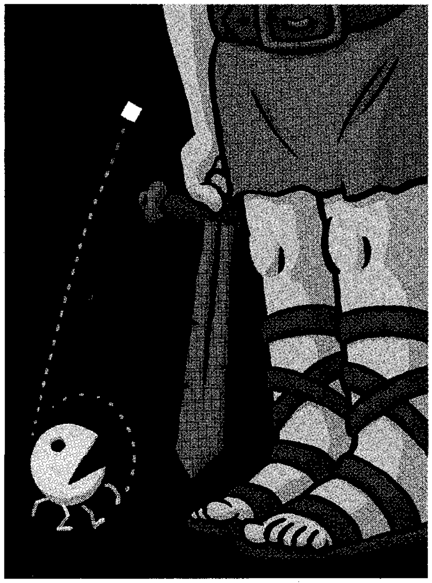
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
IN PRAISE OF THIRD PLACE

Fifteen years ago, the video-game industry was ruled by one player, Nintendo. The company had machines in a third of American homes, and it was Japan's most profitable electronics company. The title of a 1993 book summed up the situation: "Game Over: How Nintendo Conquered the World." Then the Sony PlayStation arrived, and everything changed. Today, Sony is the dominant force, and its chief rival is not Nintendo but Microsoft, which makes the Xbox. Two weeks ago, the début of Sony's PlayStation 3 was greeted by crowds of hysterical consumers anxious to get their hands on the new console, billed as the most powerful gaming machine ever. When Nintendo's new console, the oddly named Wii, appeared, a few days later, there were excellent reviews and expectations of good sales, but no more talk about world conquest. If Sony and Microsoft are the major-party nominees, Nintendo is more like a cool third-party candidate.

You might expect, then, that Nintendo would be struggling to stay afloat. After all, the prevailing wisdom is that companies need to be market leaders, or face disaster. This approach was famously institutionalized by Jack Welch, who, when he took over as C.E.O. of G.E., laid down a rule that he described as a "central idea" of his tenure: the company would quit any business in which it was not No. 1 or No. 2. The lesson that people took away from this was clear—third place is for losers. "First prize is a Cadillac Eldorado," Alec Baldwin's character says in the film "Glengarry Glen Ross." "Second prize is a set of steak knives. Third prize is you're fired." Nintendo, though, has not just survived out of the spotlight; it has thrived. It has five billion dollars in the bank from years of solid profits, and this past year, though it spent heavily on the launch of the Wii, it made close to a billion dollars in profit and saw its stock price rise by sixty-five per cent. Sony's game division, by contrast, barely eked out a profit and Microsoft's reportedly lost money. Who knew bringing up the rear could be so lucrative?

Sony and Microsoft are desperate to be the biggest players in a market that, in their vision, will encompass not just video games but "interactive entertainment" generally. That's why the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360 are all-in-one machines, which allow users not just to play video games but also to do things like watch high-definition DVDs and stream digital music. Sony and Microsoft's quest to "control the living room" has locked them in a classic arms race; they have invested billions of dollars in an attempt to surpass each other technologically, building ever-bigger, ever-better, and ever-more-expensive machines.

Nintendo has dropped out of this race. The Wii has few bells and whistles and much less processing power than its "competitors," and it features less impressive graphics. It's really well suited for just one thing: playing games. But this turns out to be an asset. The Wii's simplicity means that Nintendo can make money selling consoles, while Sony is reportedly losing more than two hundred and forty dollars on each PlayStation 3 it sells—even though they are selling for almost six hundred dollars. Similarly, because Nintendo is not trying to rule the entire industry, it's been able to focus on its core competence, which is making entertaining, innovative games. For instance, the Wii features a motion sensor that allows you to, say, hit a tennis ball onscreen by swinging the controller like a tennis racquet. Nintendo's handheld device, the DS, became astoundingly popular because of simple but brilliant games like Nintendogs, in which users raise virtual puppies. And because Nintendo sells many more of its own games than Sony and Microsoft do, its profit margins are higher, too. Arguably, Nintendo has thrived not despite its fall from the top but because of it.


CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Nintendo's success is not an anomaly, either. The business landscape of the past couple of decades is replete with companies that have flourished as third wheels, and with companies that have struggled to make money despite being No. 1 in their industries. (Today, would you rather be Honda or G.M.?) And while it's true that in many industries there is a correlation between market share and profitability, one doesn't necessarily lead to the other. A recent survey of the evidence on market share by J. Scott Armstrong and Kesten C. Green found that companies that adopt what they call "competitor-oriented objectives" actually end up hurting their own profitability. In other words, the more a company focusses on beating its competitors, rather than on the bottom line, the worse it is likely to do. And a study of the performance of twenty major American companies over four decades found that the ones putting more emphasis on market share than on profit ended up with lower returns on investment; of the six companies that defined their goal exclusively as market share, four eventually went out of business.

The point is that business is not a sporting event. Victory for one company doesn't mean defeat for everyone else. Markets today are so big—the global video-game market is now close to thirty billion dollars—that companies can profit even when they're not on top, as long as they aren't desperately trying to get there. The key is to play to your strengths while recognizing your limitations. Nintendo knew that it could not compete with Microsoft and Sony in the quest to build the ultimate home-entertainment device. So it decided, with the Wii, to play a different game entirely. Some pundits are now speculating, ironically, that the simplicity of the Wii may make it a huge hit. Nintendo wouldn't complain if that happened. But, in the meantime, third prize is looking a lot better than steak knives.

—*James Surowiecki*

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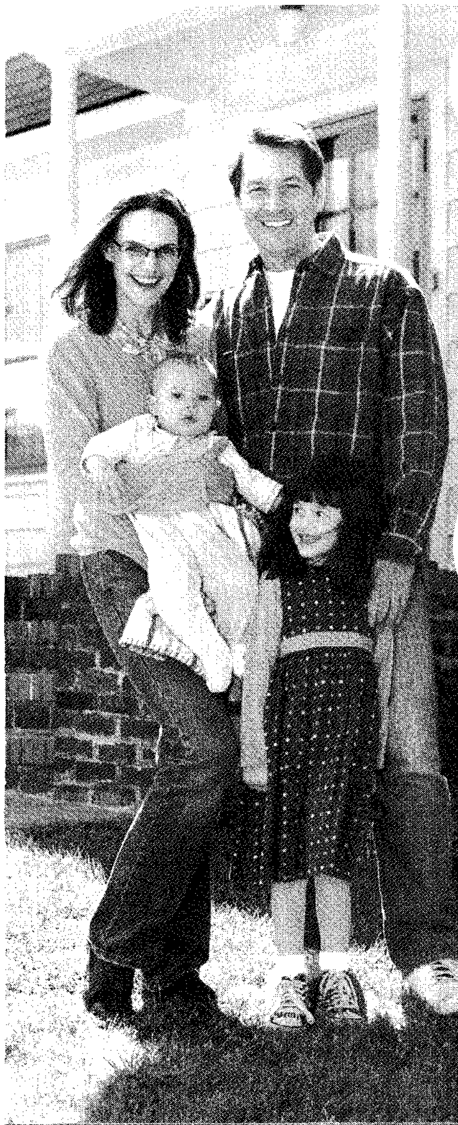

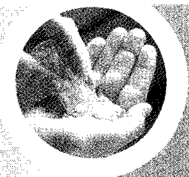

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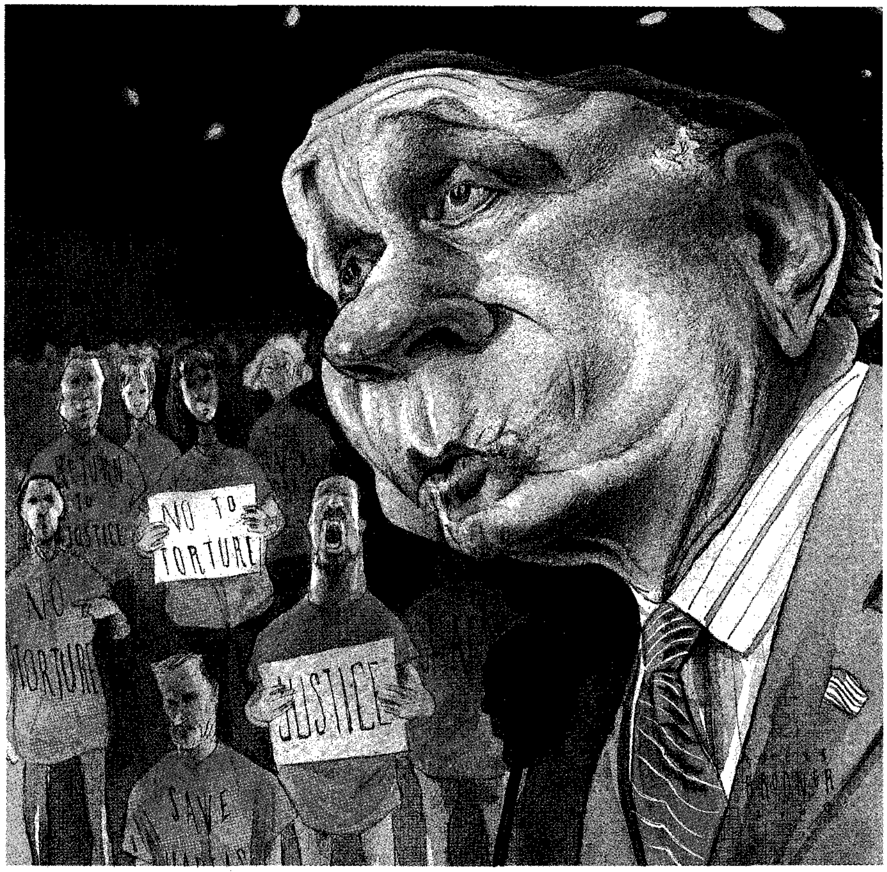
THE POLITICAL SCENE

KILLING HABEAS CORPUS

Arlen Specter's about-face.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

President Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus in Maryland on April 27, 1861, two weeks after the Confederate attack on the Union garrison at Fort Sumter. "Lincoln could look out his window at the White House and see Robert E. Lee's plantation in Virginia," Akhil Reed Amar, a professor at Yale Law School and the author of "America's Constitution," said. "He was also facing a rebellion of so-called Peace Democrats in Maryland, meaning there was a real chance that Washington would be surrounded and a real threat that the White House would be captured." On Lincoln's order, federal troops arrested Baltimore's mayor and chief of police, as well as several members of the Maryland legislature, who were jailed so that they couldn't vote to secede from the Union.



Specter has had to work in an era of ever-tighter Republican Party discipline.

Since the Middle Ages, habeas corpus—"You should have the body"—has been the principal means in Anglo-American jurisprudence by which prisoners can challenge their incarceration. In habeas-corpus proceedings, the government is required to bring a prisoner—the body—before a judge and provide a legal rationale for his continued imprisonment. The concept was so well established at the time of the founding of the American Republic that the framers of the Constitution allowed suspensions of the right only under narrow circumstances. Article I, Section 9, states, "The Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it." Such suspensions have been rare in American history. The most recent occasion was in 1871, when President Ulysses S. Grant sent federal troops to South Carolina to stop attacks by the Ku Klux Klan against newly emancipated black citizens. This fall, however, Congress passed, and President Bush signed, a new law banning the four hundred and thirty detainees held at the American naval base at Guantánamo Bay, and other enemy combatants, from filing writs of habeas corpus.

The law, known as the Military Commissions Act of 2006, was a logical culmination of an era of one-party rule in Washington. During the Presidency of George W. Bush, the executive branch, with the eager acquiescence of its Republican allies in Congress, has essentially dared the courts to defend the rights of the suspected Al Qaeda terrorists, who have been held at Guantánamo, some for as long as four years. The Supreme Court has twice taken up that challenge and forced the Administration to change tactics; the new law represented a final attempt to remove the detainees from the purview of the Court. Now, of course, Republicans no longer control Congress, but the change in the law of habeas corpus may be permanent.

Arlen Specter was an unlikely steward of the demise of habeas corpus. The Pennsylvania Republican, a senator since 1980, has long been known as a moderate in his caucus, one of the few remaining in a party that has shifted sharply to the right during his career. (The Wednesday Lunch Club, a group of liberal and moderate Republican senators, once had a dozen members. Now, after the defeat in this month's election of Senator Lincoln Chafee, of Rhode Island, it will have three: Specter and the two senators from Maine, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins.) Moreover, for all his years as a legislator, Specter remains by temperament a litigator and an iconoclast. In his autobiography, "Passion for Truth" (2000), he writes with pride about his work as a young investigator for the Warren Commission; as a crusading Philadelphia district attorney; and as an aggressive cross-examiner of Anita Hill in Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court confirmation hearings. He has, he wrote, a "fetish for facts," and

STEVE BRODNER

faith in proceedings like habeas corpus to protect individual rights.

Yet it was Specter who, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee, after leading the fight to preserve habeas corpus, at the last moment voted for the Administration's plan restricting it. At seventy-six, Specter, having survived several bouts of life-threatening illness, has lost some of the abrasiveness that earned him the nickname Snarlin' Arlen, but he generally says what he means, even when it might give offense. His self-confidence sometimes verges on arrogance; his most common expression is a knowing smirk. (It is evident in the cover photograph of his autobiography.) With some justification, and with typical bravado, Specter asserts that the debate over habeas corpus could have been avoided, if only his Republican colleagues had listened to him.

Shortly after September 11, 2001, and the American invasion of Afghanistan, Specter proposed that Congress develop a set of rules for handling the prisoners—the so-called "enemy combatants"—who were captured there. Along with Richard J. Durbin, the Illinois Democrat, Specter introduced the Military Commission Procedures Act of 2002, which would have established a system of trials for the alleged Al Qaeda detainees, with defendants guaranteed, among other things, the presumption of innocence and the right to counsel. "The whole idea never really went anywhere," Specter told me. "Nobody was much interested in it."

The Bush Administration, believing that the treatment of the detainees was a matter that belonged under the exclusive control of the executive branch, was disdainful of attempts by Congress to address the issue. "I went down to Guantánamo with a group of senators shortly after it opened, and Dave Addington was also on the trip," Lindsey Graham, the Republican senator from South Carolina, recalled, referring to Vice-President Dick Cheney's counsel, who has been a leading advocate in the Administration for a broad view of Presidential power. "As we were flying back to the States, I pulled Dave aside on the plane and said, 'You really need to come over and draft some legislation with us, and, if you do that, the Supreme Court will be much more likely to uphold what we do. It would be better to work in concert with each other when it comes to wartime decision-making about how you try and interrogate a prisoner.'

"I remember Dave had a copy of the Constitution he carried around with him," Graham went on. "He took it out, and he said the Administration didn't need congressional authorization for what it was doing. The President had the inherent authority to handle the prisoners any way he wanted. And I said, 'That may be a good legal argument, but it's not a good political argument. The more united the nation, the better it is for everyone.' But Dave said, 'Thanks but no thanks.' And after that we never had much dialogue." Or, as Specter put it, "We still had discussions with the Department of Defense—perhaps in part because the general counsel was interested in a judgeship—but they didn't go anywhere."

In the meantime, though, some of the detainees at Guantánamo, in an effort to force the government to provide legal justification for the incarcerations, began filing petitions for habeas corpus in federal courts. The first group of cases reached the Supreme Court in the spring of 2004, and the government's position was clear: the detainees had no right even to bring such cases in federal court. As Theodore B. Olson, the Solicitor General at the time, put it in the oral argument, for "an alien who had never had any relationship to the United States and who was being held as a result of a combat situation or a war situation in a foreign jurisdiction, there was no jurisdiction under the habeas statute."

But the Supreme Court soundly rejected the Administration's argument, ruling in June, 2004, that the detainees had the right to sue for their freedom. Justice John Paul Stevens, in his opinion in Rasul v. Bush, observed pointedly, "Executive imprisonment has been considered oppressive and lawless since John, at Runnymede, pledged that no free man should be imprisoned, dispossessed, outlawed, or exiled save by the judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. The judges of England developed the writ of habeas corpus largely to preserve these immunities from executive restraint." Or, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in Hamdi v. Rumsfeld, a related case that was also decided in 2004, "We have long since made clear

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that a state of war is not a blank check for the President."

In her opinion, O'Connor all but invited the Bush Administration to collaborate with Congress on a plan for the detainees. "Whatever power the United States Constitution envisions for the Executive in its exchanges with other nations or with enemy organizations in times of conflict, it most assuredly envisions a role for all three branches when individual liberties are at stake," she wrote. But, in the months that followed, the Bush Administration continued to ignore proposals for legislation on Guantánamo by Specter and others in Congress. Addington's view—that the executive branch alone could dictate the detainees' treatment and define the rules of their trials—remained the government's position. (Addington declined to comment for this article.)

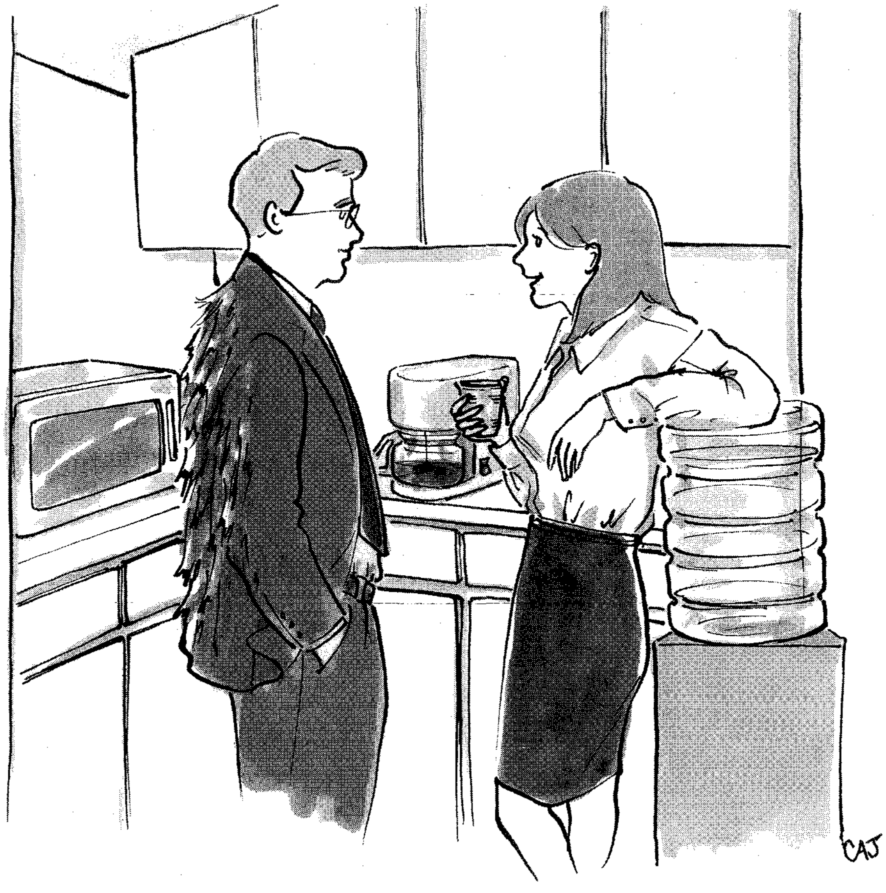
The Administration, meanwhile, drafted a plan for military commissions or tribunals for the prisoners, which could, of course, result in the imposition of the death penalty. The detainees challenged this plan, too, and another group of habeas-corpus petitions arrived at the Court last spring. The Administration's views had hardly changed since Rasul and Hamdi. As the government argued in its brief, "one of the powers inherent in military command was the authority to institute tribunals for punishing enemy violations of the law of war."

But the Court again rejected the White House's position, ruling, in Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, that Congress, and not just the President, must establish the rules for trying the prisoners. The decision in Hamdan was announced on June 29, 2006, and Specter had been waiting for it. "I pretty much knew what it was going to say, or thought I did. And we had legislation all ready to go," Specter told me. "It came down in the morning, and I introduced the legislation in the afternoon."

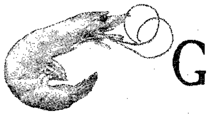
In crafting legislation, especially legislation related to the war on terror, Specter had less room to maneuver than most Republican committee chairmen. His record as a moderate nearly cost him the leadership of the Judiciary Committee before he had a chance to assume it. At a press conference on the day after he was reëlected in 2004, Specter repeated a view he had expressed many times, saying that he regarded the protection of abortion rights established by Roe v. Wade as "inviolate," and suggesting that "nobody can be confirmed today" who didn't share that opinion. Almost immediately, conservative groups in the Republican Party demanded that Specter be denied the chairmanship. Protesters chanted outside his office and inundated the Senate switchboard with telephone calls.

After a series of tense meetings with his Republican colleagues, Specter was allowed to take over as chairman of the committee, but he had to make certain promises, especially about Bush's nominations to the Supreme Court. "I have voted for all of President Bush's judicial nominees in committee and on the floor," Specter said in a carefully worded statement at the time. "And I have no reason to believe that I'll be unable to support any individual President Bush finds worthy of nomination." In the subsequent two years, Specter was as good as his word, shepherding the nominations of John G. Roberts, Jr., and Samuel A. Alito, Jr., to confirmation to the Supreme Court. Nearly two decades earlier, Specter had provided a key vote against Ronald Reagan's nomination of Robert H. Bork to the Court, but as chairman of the Judiciary Committee he became an advocate for two new Justices whose views resembled Bork's. (In a speech earlier this month to the Federalist Society, the conservative lawyers' organization, Specter said of the confirmation of Roberts and Alito, "Certainly it was the highlight of the Judiciary Committee under my chairmanship, and it may turn out to be the highlight, certainly one of the highlights, of the Presidency of George Bush.")

Specter's own beliefs appear to have changed little over the years, but he has been forced to work in an environment in which the Republican Party, especially in Congress, has imposed ever-tighter discipline. "When Lyndon Johnson became Vice-President, he wasn't welcome at Senate Democratic caucus meetings anymore, because it was for senators only," Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, told me. "But every Tuesday since Bush has been President it's been like a Mafia funeral around here. There are, like, fifteen cars with lights and sirens, and Cheney and Karl Rove come to the Republican caucus meetings and tell those guys what to do.



"I'm more of a dog person. Why?"



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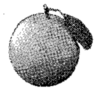

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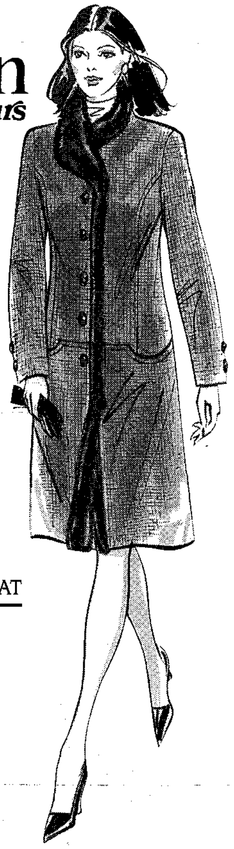

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JOHN ⚓ CHRISTIAN

It's all 'Yes, sir, yes, sir.' I bet there is not a lot of dissent that goes on in that room. In thirty-two years in the Senate, I have never seen a Congress roll over and play dead like this one."

Specter is about to begin his twenty-seventh year in the Senate, and, as its sixteenth most senior member, he has one of the grander offices in the Capitol. His elegant hideaway, behind an unmarked door a few steps from the Senate floor, includes the customary grip-and-grin politician's photographs, but the space is dominated by a more peculiar display: a large blowup of an Op-Ed piece that Specter wrote for the *Times* just before President Clinton's impeachment trial. In the article, Specter proposed a novel solution to the Lewinsky scandal. Congress should abandon its impeachment investigation, Specter asserted; instead, Clinton should face a possible criminal prosecution after his term ended. During the impeachment trial in the Senate, Clinton's lawyers presented Specter's article as a defense exhibit, to encourage Congress to drop its case against the President. "You should have heard the gasps among my colleagues on the Republican side when they introduced it," Specter told me with a laugh.

Specter played a characteristically quirky role in the impeachment saga and, in the process, managed to irritate nearly everyone. Once it was clear that the Senate was going to weigh Clinton's fate, Specter argued in favor of holding a full trial, with witnesses, among them Lewinsky, appearing in front of all the senators. (Democrats, who wanted a quick trial, objected to this idea.) But Specter also appeared unimpressed by the Republican congressmen who served as prosecutors, or managers, of the case against Clinton. He even referred to Lindsey Graham, then a congressman, as "Congressman Lindsey." In the end, Specter cast the most famous vote at Clinton's trial, neither "guilty" nor "not guilty" but, rather, what he called the "Scottish verdict" of "not proven." (It was recorded as a vote against conviction and, thus, for Clinton.) As Specter recounted in his autobiography, a reporter asked him when he left the Senate floor after casting his vote, "Did you anger both sides by doing it this way?"

"'I've had some experience with that,' I replied," he wrote. "The room broke out in laughter."

For Specter, there was another postscript to the Clinton trial. The congressman to whom Specter had condescended during the testimony soon became his colleague in the Senate. And Graham, a former lawyer for the Air Force, became Specter's most determined adversary on the issue of habeas corpus.

"The war on terror is not like any other war," Graham told me. "It's a war without end. There are no capitals to conquer, no navies to sink. The Geneva Conventions say that you need a procedure in place with an independent arbiter making a decision about whether detainees belong in prison. My goal was to create that kind of process, but not in a way that has federal judges making determinations about who is an enemy combatant. I don't think they're competent to make those decisions in a war that is going to go on for a long time. I think that decision belongs to the military."

Unlike Specter, Graham has little apparent reverence for the Senate's recondite procedures and seniority rules. In 2005, as a freshman senator, he bypassed the Judiciary Committee and went straight to the Senate floor with a proposal to ban habeas cases by Guantánamo detainees. After the Supreme Court issued its decision in Hamdan, earlier this year, Graham raised the issue again.

This time, Graham sought to ban habeas cases by the detainees at a moment when Congress was considering a host of other legal changes pertaining to their treatment. Under the Administration's initial plan to hold military trials at Guantánamo, evidence obtained through torture could be admissible. Graham, along with his Republican colleagues John Warner and John McCain, rejected that notion and proposed an alternative. The Bush Administration responded by offering several concessions, including allowing detainees to see all the evidence against them and outlawing the use of evidence that had been obtained by torture or "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment"—a change meant to assure compliance with the Geneva Conventions. (In the final version of that measure, however, the three Republican legislators agreed to let the military determine whether the conventions had been violated, a significant concession to the Bush Administration.)

In light of these new rules for trials at Guantánamo, Graham thought that the habeas-corpus filings by the prisoners should stop. "My goal was to create some form of due process that was not as invasive as a habeas trial, because I do believe they impede the running of the jail," he said. Graham proposed that rulings against the detainees be appealed only to the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. (His legislation thus avoided the district court for the D.C. Circuit, which has generally looked more favorably on detainee claims than has the court of appeals.) In Graham's view, the court of appeals is an adequate substitute for habeas corpus. "The way I read what the Supreme Court said was that, if there was no system in place to decide someone's confinement status, you had to let them file habeas petitions," Graham said. "But I think if you give them the D.C. Circuit, that's enough. That's a legitimate alternative. Arlen disagrees. He thinks it's a constitutional right to file a habeas case. I think our statute gives you enough. That's what Specter v. Graham is about."

"That's just ridiculous," Specter told me, referring to Graham's position. "Graham's legislation does not allow the D.C. Circuit to make any fact-finding at all about what happened to the detainees and whether they are, in fact, enemy combatants. It's not a 'streamline' review; it's no kind of review at all." The legislation will almost certainly come before the Supreme Court, but it's impossible to know whether the Court will uphold it. "The D.C. Circuit would have to be an adequate and effective judicial remedy for reviewing the lawfulness of any detention, because that's the basic definition of habeas corpus," Gerald L. Neuman, a professor at Harvard Law School, said. "The law itself isn't very clear about what the D.C. Circuit should do."

When Specter learned that Graham, with the Administration's support, was trying to ban the detainees from filing more habeas cases, he did everything he could as chairman of the Judiciary Committee to stop the idea, including filing an amendment to the bill. With just a few days' notice, he convened a hearing on the plan to strip the courts of jurisdiction in the detainees' cases. The session took place on September 25th, a Monday morning, a time rarely devoted to Senate business.

The scene in the hearing room of the Dirksen Senate Office Building anticipated, in a small way, the spirit of rebellion that would animate the electorate seven weeks later. The session began with bipartisan expressions of outrage at the Administration's (and Graham's) plan. "It is inexplicable to me how someone can seek to divest the federal courts of jurisdiction on constitutional issues, just inexplicable to me," Specter said in his introductory remarks. "If the courts are not open to decide constitutional issues, how is constitutionality going to be tested?" Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat, spoke next. "Today we're addressing the single most consequential provision in this much discussed bill," he said. "This provision would perpetuate the indefinite detention of hundreds of individuals, against whom the government has brought no charges and presented no evidence and without any recourse to justice whatsoever. That is un-American. This is un-American." At that moment, a group of protesters wearing T-shirts saying "Shame," "End Torture," and "Save Habeas Corpus" rose from their seats and cheered.

Specter rebuked them gently. "There will be no demonstrations from the people in the room," he said. "We want you to be here. We want you to listen. But that's out of order."

Until this point, the debate over the Senate bill had focussed on the rules for the commissions, or trials. But Thomas Sullivan, a veteran Chicago lawyer and former United States Attorney, turned the senators' attention to a different subject. Sullivan, who represents several Saudi nationals held at Guantánamo, pointed out that the government planned to give about eighty of the four hundred and thirty detainees full trials. The rest would receive only an abbreviated hearing known as a Combatant Status Review Tribunal (C.S.R.T.). At these proceedings, detainees are not allowed to call witnesses (unless the witnesses are other detainees at Guantánamo), have no attorneys present, and are presumed guilty of being an enemy combatant based on evidence that they are not allowed to see.

With barely concealed rage, Sullivan lectured Senator John Cornyn, the

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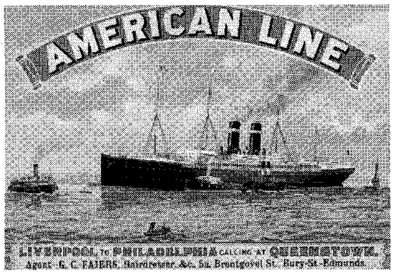
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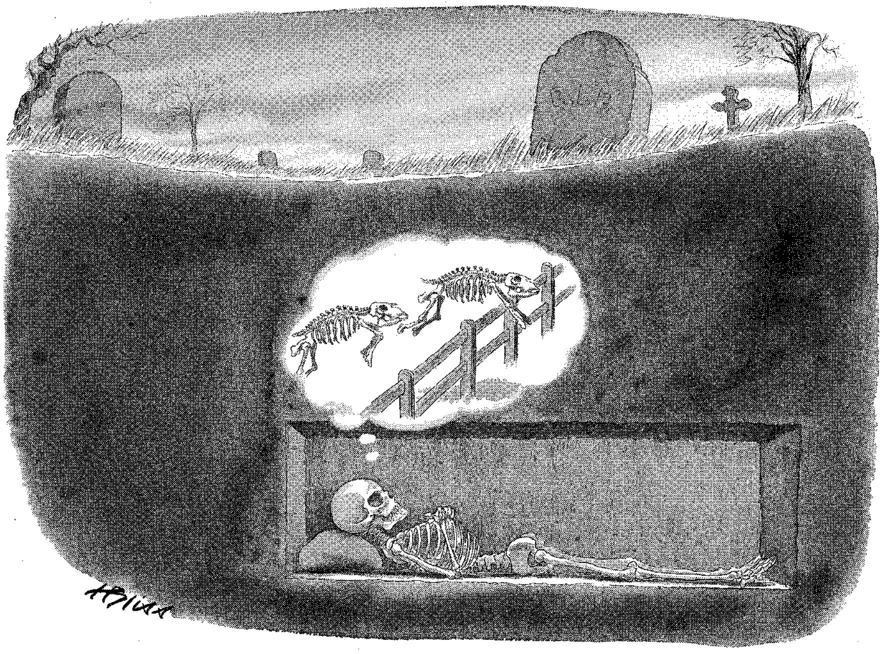

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Texas Republican who was defending the Administration's position at the hearing. "The question is whether they are enemy combatants. And when they started out in these hearings, these C.S.R.T.s, they were presumed guilty. There had already been a finding they were enemy combatants. The determination had been made. No witness or evidence was presented by the government. They would call in and they'd say, 'O.K., Mr. Cornyn, here's the charge against you. What have you got to say about it?' That was it. That was all that they did. And then they put in some classified evidence. I've been down to the secure facility. It's a joke. It's a sham."

The ban on habeas cases was likely to have a dramatic effect on the detainees at Guantánamo, but for a less than obvious reason. The procedure for military trials, brokered by Graham, Warner, and McCain, has won a measure of support from some of the human-rights advocates and lawyers who have been representing the prisoners. "If they were to charge them under the military commissions, it's a pretty good substitute for a criminal trial," Sullivan told me later. "They have to put evidence on the stand, right to a lawyer, subpoena power, and you can see and confront the evidence against you. But what most people don't understand is that the government has said they are not going to try more than about eighty of the prisoners who are there. The real question is what happens to the three hundred other detainees? All they got are those pathetic C.S.R.T.s."

In introducing the C.S.R.T.s, in 2004, the Department of Defense announced that, as part of the process, "detainees will also be notified of their right to seek a writ of habeas corpus in the courts of the United States." Because of the new bill, this will no longer be the case. "You're talking about people who have been in custody for four years, some of them haven't even been questioned in two years, and the C.S.R.T. is all they have got in terms of a hearing, and it's all they're likely ever to get," Sullivan said. "Their only hope was habeas, where the government would have to justify in some way why they're being held year after year."

Two days after the hearing by the Judiciary Committee, debate began in the Senate on Specter's amendment to preserve the right of detainees to bring habeas cases. "The right of habeas corpus was established in the Magna Carta in 1215, when, in England, there was action taken against King John to establish a procedure to prevent illegal detention," Specter said. "What the bill seeks to do is set back basic rights by some nine hundred years." As several of his Republican colleagues, including Graham, Cornyn, and John Kyl, of Arizona, rose to support the habeas ban, Specter deftly parried their arguments, without consulting aides or notes.

Kyl asserted that "the consequences of the Specter amendment are unimaginable. We cannot allow enemy war prisoners to sue us in our own courts. Such a system would make it simply impossible for the United States to fight a war." But Specter had an answer. "Mr. President," he said, addressing the chair. "I only need one sentence to refute the arguments of the senator from Arizona, and it comes back to Justice O'Connor's opinion again: 'All agree that, absent suspension, the writ of habeas corpus remains available to every individual'—every individual—'detained within the United States.' Guantánamo was held to be within that concept. But she talks about 'every individual.' That includes citizens and noncitizens."

The outcome of the Specter amendment was in doubt until the day the vote was cast. The final tally was fifty-one to forty-eight against Specter. (Olympia Snowe was absent, attending a funeral.) When the result was announced, Specter, visibly angry, left the Senate chamber. He told reporters that he thought the habeas ban was "patently unconstitutional" and vowed to vote against the detainee bill.

In the chaotic few days before the vote, the Administration's allies in the Senate had toughened the habeas provision of the law. The bill had originally applied only to alleged enemy combatants who were held at Guantánamo. The final version stated that any alien (that is, non-American citizen) who had been seized anywhere and charged with being an enemy combatant would be denied the right to petition for habeas corpus. The definition of "enemy combatant" was also expanded, to include not just those who took up arms but financial supporters of the terrorist cause as well. Accordingly, the bill made clear that aliens arrested in the United States and charged with knowingly giving money to an alleged terrorist organization would be forbidden to sue for their freedom.

Nevertheless, on September 28th, Specter joined all his Republican colleagues (except Lincoln Chafee) in voting for the Military Commissions Act, which passed by a vote of sixty-five to thirty-four. President Bush signed the law on October 17th, and the next day the government began filing court papers asking

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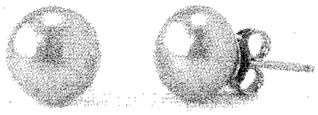

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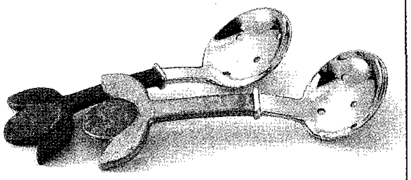

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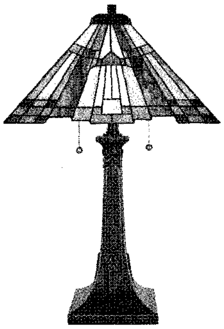

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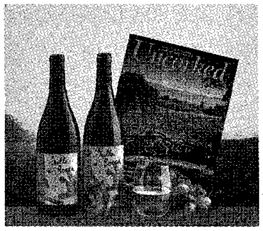

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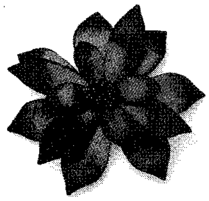

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for the dismissal of all the petitions for habeas corpus filed by detainees at Guantánamo Bay.

It is hard to believe that the Arlen Specter of the nineteen-eighties—the maverick who defied his party on an issue of the magnitude of the Bork nomination—would have considered yielding on a question as fundamental as habeas corpus. "I was madder than hell when the habeas-corpus amendment went down and was a little hot and spoke prematurely on the vote," Specter told me. "If we had not passed the bill, we would be going on into next year without having a procedure to try these people." Thus, he said, he felt obligated to vote for the bill.

If Specter has accommodated his views to his party's, his leisure habits have not changed: he still plays squash seven days a week, a routine that he has maintained since the nineteen-seventies. "I think of playing squash as making deposits in the 'health bank,'" Specter told me shortly after dawn one recent morning in the locker room of the gym at the Federal Reserve bank, in Washington. "That's a good thing, because I've made a lot of withdrawals, too." In 1993, Specter was found to have a brain tumor and was told that he had three to six weeks to live. However, he recovered quickly after surgery. Then, just after his reëlection in 2004, he was given a diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease, and during the first several months of his tenure as chairman of the Judiciary Committee he received chemotherapy.

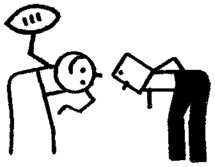
Specter completed his treatment in 2005, and never stopped playing squash. The therapy cost him his bushy curls, but his hair is full again, only straight this time. Wearing a ratty sweatshirt, a souvenir from the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, he looked at least a decade younger than his age. He still bears the scars of his years as a bruiser on the squash court—Senator Robert Packwood once gave him a swat that took six stitches to close—but he now plays more of a finesse game, built around a deadly drop shot. I won our first game, 16–14, but Specter took the next three, to win the match. He plays the same old-school, hardball version of the game as the capital's other celebrated septuagenarian squash enthusiast, Donald Rumsfeld, but the two men have never met on the court.

Specter was about to head to Rhode Island, to campaign for Lincoln Chafee. "I'm going up there to say that Chafee could hold the balance of power in our caucus," Specter told me. "That's what those of us in the middle can do." But in the habeas debate, at the crucial moment, Specter tipped the balance of power toward those who, at the time, already had it. Some Democrats on Capitol Hill are calling the debate Specter's "John Kerry moment." (He was against the habeas bill before he was for it.)

Of course, Specter's vote on habeas, like his support of Roberts and Alito, forestalled another possible conservative revolt against his chairmanship (which, in the event, the election cost him). Specter is hoping the courts will restore the rights of the detainees to bring habeas cases. "The bill was severable. It has a severability clause. And I think the courts will invalidate it," he told me. "They're not going to give up authority to decide habeas-corpus cases, not a chance." Others are less sure.

"It's a pretty odd position for Specter to take," Amar, of Yale Law School, said. "He trusts the courts to take care of a problem when he's voting for something that strips them of their jurisdiction to do it. It's like saying, 'I shot at her, but I knew I was going to miss.' Still, he may be right. The Court might strike it down." According to Amar, the election that cost Specter so much of his clout makes it more likely that his legal position will ultimately be vindicated on habeas corpus.

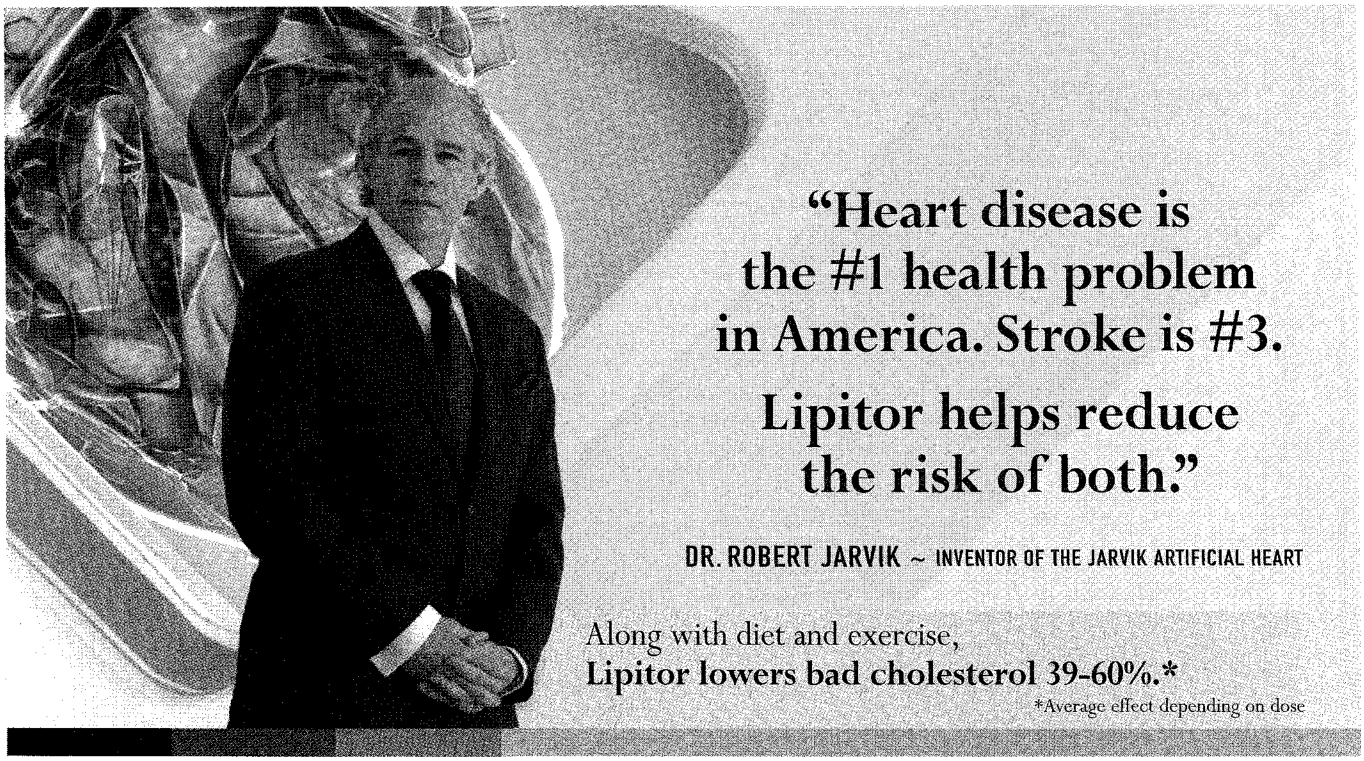
"The Justices always want to protect their own power, and they hate the idea of any kind of jurisdiction-stripping," Amar said. "But if they can avoid it they also don't want to pick fights with the President and the Congress, especially about anything related to national security. But, with the Democrats in control of Congress, the Court will know that if they strike this down it'll never get passed again in anything like this form. The Republicans would just come back at them and pass the same thing again and again. The Democrats never will. The irony is, thanks to the election, the Court now has plenty of running room to do the right thing."



In the meantime, however, the Administration has moved swiftly to use the new powers granted by Congress in the Military Commissions Act. In acting to dismiss the pending habeas cases filed by Guantánamo detainees, the Justice Department has adopted Lindsey Graham's reasoning, that the bill does not amount to a "suspension" under the Constitution but merely substitutes the D.C. Circuit appeals court for the habeas cases. In a brief filed on November 13th in the D.C. Circuit, the government asserted that the new law "plainly affords an adequate and effective substitute for any applicable habeas right."

The Administration has sought to apply the new law outside Guantánamo. Ali Saleh Kahlah al-Marri, a forty-one-year-old citizen of Qatar, was studying at Bradley University, in Peoria, Illinois, when he was detained shortly after September 11, 2001. He has been held in a Navy brig as an enemy combatant for more than three years, and had filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus, asking to be freed. On November 13th, the government filed a brief saying that the new law bars Marri's lawsuit: the act "removes federal court jurisdiction over pending and future habeas corpus actions and any other actions filed by or on behalf of detained aliens determined by the United States to be enemy combatants." If this motion is granted, Marri could remain in custody on American soil indefinitely, without any further legal recourse.

Leahy, the incoming chairman of the Judiciary Committee, voted against the Military Commissions Act and denounced its habeas provisions in especially harsh terms. But there are no signs that the new Democratic majority will take on habeas corpus anytime soon. Few Democratic politicians seem enthusiastic about proposing legislation that will principally benefit accused Al Qaeda terrorists, and, in the unlikely event that Democrats passed such a bill, it would face a certain veto from President Bush. The Supreme Court—not Congress—is likely to be the only hope for a change in the law. "This is definitely not going to be the first thing out of the box for us," one Democratic Senate staffer said. "We make fun of Specter, but we're basically leaving it up to the Courts, too." ♦



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“BORAT”: THE MEMO

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

Dear Ken:

Got your note, deeply honored. Being new to the company, really appreciate opportunity to outline some ideas for “Borat” DVD. As Josh mentioned, we do indeed have a wealth of footage that could be put to good use as DVD extras. In other cases, have taken liberty of suggesting some reshoots:

OPENING “VILLAGE” SECTION: How about a high-speed montage of the actual difficult, brutal lives of the villagers in Romania—the hours of debilitating toil, their oppression at the hands of their corrupt government, premature loss of teeth, death of infants, etc., etc.—culminating in a panning shot of the village on the morning of the day when they first realize they’ve been had, and that, as far as posterity goes, they will always be remembered, if remembered at all, as savages, rapists, prostitutes, etc., and they stumble out of their little sheds or whatever, looking traumatized? (Would be good if one or two could fall into depression/commit suicide as a result = confirmation of their “subhuman” status? Rich social commentary.)

ALT: The scene where the one-armed old man, many months later, weeps in his room at the memory of being tricked into wearing a sex toy on his arm. Priceless!

SOUTHERN DINING SOCIETY SECTION: Do we have footage of the woman Borat identified as unattractive being consoled in her darkened living room later that night by her husband? Particularly good if, all her life, she’s fought the feeling that she was not attractive, and only recently has come to feel pretty, owing to the steady love of her husband, who does, in fact, find her pretty, in part because of her kindness to him and others in their community—and now all those wounds have been reopened! Also, although she is crying, she tries to cry quietly, so as not to alarm the kids. Super!

PAM ANDERSON (1): The scene where Sacha’s powerful agent calls Pamela Anderson’s powerful agent and they chat about the mutual benefit of having her appear in the film, and whether it will bother her to have the Tommy Lee sex video referenced. Apparently, they decide, it won’t.

PENTECOSTAL SECTION: The scene where those wacky Pentecostals offer to take Borat into their homes, as Jesus would have done, and as, in fact, per Josh, many of them actually did? And also, didn’t they, like, take up a collection on Sacha/Borat’s behalf or something? Guess they really walk the walk! This moving-in-with-some-Pentecostals would be good, especially if, once in their home, Sacha could mock one of their children for, say, his/her overly prim table manners. That would really go a long way toward puncturing the sanctimonious posturing of the neocons.

RODEO NATIONAL ANTHEM SECTION: Would be great if we had a series of shots where we see hundreds of people in the rodeo audience driving home, in their “pickups” or whatever, troubled at the thought that hundreds of other people in the audience continued to cheer even after the “Bush drinking blood” line. We could focus on one particular couple who have had complicated feelings about the war in Iraq from the beginning, even though they (1) live in the South and (2) enjoy rodeo. (Although too unbelievable?) A nice touch might be: This family sees Borat hitchhiking, picks him up, he sits in back seat of car with kids, takes shit in back seat, then pretends to be humping the family dog, and we see, from their reaction, that they really are rednecks after all.

PAM ANDERSON (2): The scene where, during “rehearsals” for the naked-wrestling, balls-in-the-face scene, Sacha takes a break to call his powerful agent on his cell phone, to see how negotiations with Pamela Anderson’s powerful agent are going.

“GANGSTA” SECTION: The scene where Borat says something intentionally offensive to the inner-city black guys—where is that scene? I have been unable to find it. Here I definitely suggest a reshoot. In the attachment, I have provided a list of common racial slurs that Sacha could try out on “the brothers,” just to see what they do to him. My thought is, that seems to be the ethos of the rest of the film—i.e., Sacha saying/doing the most offensive things possible, in order to elicit a reaction—so I sense a little inconsistency here. Thoughts?

GAY PRIDE PARADE SECTION: Ditto here. Where are the gays insulted? Have noted, from perusing other sections of film, that chief targets of satire seem to be clueless middle-class whites, so a suggestion: Cull through Gay Pride footage to I.D. some clueless middle-class white gays, ask them embarrassing personal questions—e.g., Borat could quiz naïvely about details of anal sex, etc. What a riot!

PAM ANDERSON (3): Do we have footage of Sacha thanking Pam after the kidnapping scene, praising her for the naturalness of her acting, promising to do lunch, handing her a check, etc., etc.? What I love about this is the way it very clearly says: Gotcha! We celebrities are Us, you non-celebs are You. Stay on your side of the line, No-Name.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: Finally, if I may be so bold, sir? Possible idea for “Borat II”: In selected redneck Midwestern location (Chicago?), as audience leaves theatre having just seen “Borat” we film them as they are sprayed with a stinging toxic foam, which drives them into paroxysms of itching, which causes them to strip naked; then we release seventy or eighty “attack dogs,” at which time we approach, asking for donations for AIDS relief in Africa. This could be classic! People would finally see, once and for all, when audience responds by swearing, etc., what hypocrites Americans really are.

Anxious to hear your thoughts.
Your intern,
Glen ♦

ON THE AIR

VOICE OF THE CABAL

Bob Fass and the slow fade of countercultural radio.

BY MARC FISHER

Any night but Thursday, Bob Fass likes to wait until after twelve o'clock, after his wife, Lynnie, has gone to sleep, and then drive his banged-up old Chrysler from his house, in Staten Island, to Manhattan, where he bombs up and down the avenues, imagining the radio show he might be doing. For nearly five decades, the hours before dawn have been Fass's prime time. He's an all-night radio man, a shy hulking fellow, round-shouldered and fleshy, with a few remaining strands of hair pulled back in a thin ponytail. As he drives from Staten Island through New Jersey and into the Holland Tunnel, Fass reviews the events of the day, the latest on the war in Iraq, the pronouncements of President George W. Bush, and with each clip of Bush's voice he summons a piece of music, a lyric, a sixties protest song, or a choice snippet of irony from Richard Nixon or Lenny Bruce. Played back to back, or, better yet, played simultaneously, the right pieces of sound create a commentary, an audio art piece, the kind of blend that Fass has been mixing on his show on WBAI, "Radio Unnameable," since 1962.

When Fass, who is seventy-three, arrives downtown at the WBAI studios, he stops in to see one of the few old friends who still manage to keep his hours. Or he picks up his mail, or he just drives and listens for the connections. In his mind, he hears the juxtapositions of speech and song that, long before cable TV, the Internet, or satellite radio, made Fass's show on the listener-sponsored station a place where musicians tried out new material, political rebels plotted, and the young and the outsiders gathered to convince themselves that they were not alone. Fass's "Radio Unnameable" used to be on five nights a week. No more: most nights now, Fass tunes the radio to 99.5 FM and listens to his midnight successors: Moorish Orthodox anarchists, a bisexual pagan feminist, ravers, and an African-American comedy troupe—a lineup that reflects the factionalism that has come to consume WBAI. While much of the station's white, liberal audience drifted away, managers and program hosts went at one another with lawsuits, personnel purges, and fights over race, ideology, and how to appeal to the city's growing black, Latino, and Asian populations. As a result of those internecine struggles, Fass, the station's last link to its role as a narrator and an organizer of New York's nineteen-sixties protest movement, has been relegated to one night a week, Thursday.

For twenty years, Fass has been almost a ghost at WBAI. Some staffers know how he found a way, even at the pinnacle of the Top Forty era of shouting d.j.s and dance crazes, to put the counterculture on the radio. Some have a vague notion that he started free-form radio, each night creating a program with no format, an improvised mélange of live music, speeches, and random phone calls. "Radio Unnameable" was a radio party line on which Fass piled one caller atop another and said, "Speak among yourselves." It was a forum for eyewitness reports from war zones and urban conflicts, recitations of poetry and prose, solicitations for political causes, testimonials for illegal drugs, and experiments with noise and silence.

Driving back home to Staten Island with the radio off, Fass keeps his attention fixed on the next show, even when it is a week away. As the Chrysler glides over the empty Bayonne Bridge, Fass is elsewhere: cuing up a Hare Krishna chant to accompany a speech by Adolf Hitler; or playing the first version of Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant," which Fass liked so much that he once played it repeatedly for the better part of five hours; or inviting Marshall Efron to recite "The Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld," in which snippets from the erstwhile Secretary of Defense's news briefings are rejiggered to make him sound like a steely version of a Beat poet.

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Fass pulls up in front of his ramshackle bungalow, across from an abandoned chocolate factory. The inside of his house is a thicket of old clothes, towers of videocassettes, and hundreds of boxes containing tape reels, the primary archive of "Radio Unnameable." The tapes form teetering piles in the living room, down the halls, and into the bedrooms—boxes and boxes of them, thousands of hours of recordings featuring Bob Dylan and Abbie Hoffman, Timothy Leary and Wavy Gravy, Allen Ginsberg and Kinky Friedman. Many of the tapes are not labelled. Fass fumbles through a pile and finds a show to play. From the writing on the box, it's not clear if the show originally aired in 1969 or 1999. Whatever the year, the program begins the same way, a bed of quiet and then, very softly, "This is 'Radio Unnameable.' My name's Bob Fass. Good morning, cabal."

Bob Fass (second from left) and other WBAI staffers in New York City, August 7, 1969. Photograph by Richard Avedon.

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As the tape rolls, seven cats slip in and out of the room. Ceiling tiles droop down onto stacked tape decks and VCRs. Speaker wire crisscrosses the room, strung from one bookshelf to another, from the ceiling to the floor, a tangle of dozens of attempts to mine the sounds of the past. Worn rugs lie atop other worn rugs. Old sports jackets hang from a metal rod. In a shoebox, Fass finds a show from the height of the protests against the Vietnam War. He listens and waits for Thursday. "I'd like to do more on the radio," he says. "I'd like to get paid. But, even if I can't do that, I'd like to turn on the radio and not know what to expect."

WBAI, once headquartered in a converted church near the Queensboro Bridge, is now, incongruously, on the tenth floor of an office building on Wall Street. Decades after Fass became famous as what Abbie Hoffman called "the secret weapon" in "the verbal trenches from which we made war on plastic culture," he walks through the station lobby without being recognized. WBAI, like radio stations everywhere, now plays a diminished role in the popular imagination. In the sixties, when Fass created a program that spoke directly to young people alienated by the frenetic sounds of AM radio's two-minute pop tunes, the FM band offered a revolutionary opening—a place in the popular culture where winning the biggest possible audience was not the only measure of success. Fass's approach inspired other experiments on FM. Within a few years, commercial radio stations were busy developing programming for dozens of demographic slices of the American audience—light rock for young-adult women, hard rock for young-adult men, elevator music for the older crowd, and on and on.

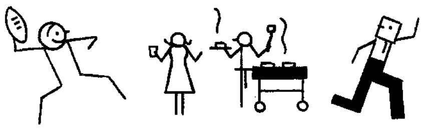
Radio's embrace of niche programming turned out to be an early example of the marketing revolution that changed the way Americans did business. Radio stations, relying heavily on market research, launched new programming that grew ever more predictable and bland. As new media emerged, young people drifted off to discover music online. By the nineteen-nineties, many stations across the country were under the control of media conglomerates such as the Texas-based company Clear Channel, which owns nearly twelve hundred stations. Two satellite-radio companies, XM and Sirius, sought to do for radio what cable had achieved in television, winning over audiences by slicing the niches even more thinly. If anyone is creating new communities through radio, it's happening in broadcasts targeted at ethnic minorities, on podcasts and on music blogs on the Internet—all driven by people who, like Fass, feel compelled to reach out beyond their circle of friends in order to share their music and politics. New technologies force old media to specialize, and at WBAI, as in much of radio, that situation has created a long, bitter battle over just how narrowly it can define its audience without becoming irrelevant.

The station's programming, which in Fass's early years featured literary readings, classical music, and political discussions of an academic bent, has become a Balkanized schedule of shows such as "First Voices Indigenous Radio," "Out-FM," "Joy of Resistance" ("multicultural feminist radio"), "Beyond the Pale" ("progressive Jewish politics"), "The Largest Minority" ("issues affecting people with disabilities"), "Afrikaleidoscope," and "Asia Pacific Forum." Fass's show is one of the few on the station seeking a broad audience. "It's become very tough to be at the station," Fass said. "I feel like there's no 'us' anymore, just each group with its own little corner. There are black nationalists who don't have much patience for white people. There are young people who don't want any old fogies around. I always thought unity makes a lot more sense than separation. But a lot of people don't want to hear that anymore."

In his bunk at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, just after the Korean War, Robert Morton Fass, a draftee from Brooklyn, starved for a bit more irony than the United States Army's training programs provided, tucked his transistor radio under the pillow and tuned to WOR's powerhouse signal from New York City. Fass stayed up, listening to the stories spun by Jean Shepherd, the all-night talker who might deliver a play-by-play account of the Christians' battle against the lions or tell of the mysterious man whose taste buds were so finely developed that he could identify the year and model of refrigerator that produced a given ice cube.

Growing up in the nineteen-forties, Fass built a pretend radio with his Erector set and practiced speaking into the microphone. On his stoop, on East Twenty-sixth Street and Avenue K, Bob introduced his friends to folk music. At Midwood High School, where he was selected to make the announcements over the intercom each morning, "Bob found that he could change himself and the people around him with his voice," his brother Dick said. After stints at Syracuse University and a paper-cup factory in Queens, Fass studied acting under Sydney Pollack and joined Stella Adler's theatre workshop. In 1960, when he was twenty-seven, Fass landed the part of Smith, the jailer, in the classic production of Brecht's "The Threepenny Opera," starring Lotte Lenya, at the Theatre de Lys, in Greenwich Village. "It wasn't that the director was so impressed by my mastery of technique," Fass recalled. "I just happened to fit the costume from the last guy who had the role." At the same time, Fass volunteered to read stories and novels on WBAI, an odd little FM station that aired radio drama, jazz, and a program entitled "Existentialism for Young People."

When a job opened up for a staff announcer, Fass's voice and speaking style—mellifluous and strong yet unusually relaxed, like a classical-music announcer without the intellectual superiority—seemed perfect. WBAI offered eighty dollars a week, a good bit more than the theatre paid. The station, one of the first FM outlets in New York, was accustomed to taking chances. WBAI was the hobby of Louis Schweitzer, an eccentric millionaire who had made his fortune in paper manufacturing. Schweitzer bought the station in 1957 because he wanted to hear fewer ads and more classical music, and also news of events that the *Times* did not cover. When that formula produced deficits, Schweitzer decided that profits and good radio were incompatible. In 1960, he donated WBAI to the Pacifica Foundation, a Berkeley-based media experiment that asked listeners, rather than advertisers, to sponsor its stations.



The basics of announcing quickly bored Fass, but he craved a chance to use radio to bring his nightly observations of and adventures in Greenwich Village to his listeners. He thought he might spin some of the music he heard from Phil Ochs and other emerging folkies who played the coffeehouses, throw in bits of theatre, maybe share some of the novelty records he picked up at secondhand shops. Fass got permission to keep WBAI on the air past 1 A.M., its usual sign-off time. "I tried to make it as unlike anything else as I could," he said. "I wanted to put my culture on the air—the Greenwich Village 'cul-chah'—politics and exotic people. I'd put anyone on, because the idea was that, if you didn't like what I was doing, three minutes later I'd be doing something else."

No one at the station much cared what Fass did—after midnight, who was listening? So if Fass played a record called "How to Teach Your Parakeet to Talk" just because he thought it was funny, or if he featured a strange, falsetto-voiced singer who called himself Tiny Tim and sang songs that paid tribute to the a-cappella groups of the nineteen-thirties, that was fine. On one of his first nights on the air, Fass yielded to the entreaties of a stage manager he knew who touted the parodies and songs of her sister's friend, a young folksinger from Minnesota named Bob Dylan. Dylan came on the show and pretended to be the chief of a company that made clothing for folksingers. Dylan returned to perform comic monologues in the voice of characters such as Rumple Billy Burp, Elvis Bickel, and Frog Rugster. One night, Dylan fielded calls from listeners, including a starstruck high-school student who begged for approval of his decision to wear his hair long, even if it violated school rules. Dylan's response was, essentially, Do as you're told. Then Dylan chastised a listener for tuning in to non-commercial radio "just to make yourself feel better." Whenever the show slowed that night, Dylan took to the phones, cajoling female callers into describing their bodies in ever more glorious detail.

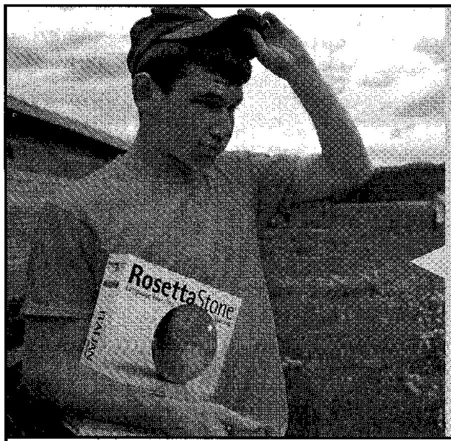
The all-night show emerged from the sounds of the streets and from three turntables, two tape machines, and Fass's burgeoning library of tape—boxes stacked randomly in his apartment on Cornelia Street in the Village, and around the WBAI studios. Fass recruited regular guests from the Village scene—activists and artists such as José Feliciano, Richie Havens, and Paul Krassner—who became part of a free-flowing collage of music and speech as messy and wild as his apartment. "When two pieces of information bump up against each other, something else occurs," Fass said. "Dylan sings 'While riding on a train goin' west,' and I juxtapose sounds of war and battle, and it creates a third thing, one commenting on the other."

Marijuana was a constant on "Radio Unnameable." (The title had come from a novel that Fass was reading, "The Unnameable," by Samuel Beckett.) Larry Josephson, WBAI's manager in the seventies, said, "Drugs were as much a part of Fass's show as coffee was for Arthur Godfrey"—the genial morning man of forties radio. Fass, by being open about drugs, built credibility. Listeners would phone him for guidance on the quality of acid being sold in the Village. When a caller needed to be talked down from a bad trip, he would ring up a young psychiatrist he knew, and she'd calm the frightened listener.

But far more than drugs inspired the nightly mix. "I was influenced by psychotherapy," Fass said, "by the idea of encouraging someone to talk. Give them enough rope and you learn who they are." He brought in representatives of a phony group called Stamp Out Smut to rail against the profane comedy of Lenny Bruce—and then Fass rolled tape of Bruce's manic monologues.

Fass had no idea what to call this relationship he had created with his audience. He asked listeners to name themselves, to suggest a collective noun. The best suggestion was a word that could describe people who meet secretly, mostly at night, their identities unknown even to one another. From then on, Fass opened each program with the same greeting: "Good morning, cabal."

As word spread about "Radio Unnameable," people just walked into the station to watch, listen, smoke a joint, push their cause. There were no guards, no receptionists at WBAI at midnight. The more people Fass had around him, the more daring he became on the air. "At this time, WBAI concludes another day of scaring people," he once signed off. He let his hair grow. The other guys at the station started



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seeing women return night after night to be with the man behind that seductive bass—Fassbunnies, his jealous colleagues dubbed them. Over time, Fass spoke less on the air; it was as if the show conducted itself. As Miles Davis said of his own embrace of silence, Fass chose "not to play all the notes you could play, but to wait, hesitate, let space become a part of the configuration." After midnight—free from the drive-time tyranny of time and temperature, news and ads—a voice on the radio reaches listeners in cars and bars, isolated in empty offices and darkened bedrooms. "If we sit and talk in a dark room, words suddenly acquire new meanings and different textures," Marshall McLuhan said of late-night radio. "All those gestural qualities that the printed page strips from language come back in the dark, and on the radio."

Fass took advantage of the night to make his show calm where AM radio was frenetic. "Something cracked and America said, 'Wow, I don't have to be like that anymore,'" Fass said, mimicking the loud, overenunciated AM d.j. style. "I can be"—he slipped into his buttery FM voice—"like this." That difference captured listeners such as Lynnie Tofte, who recalled herself at twelve, a Staten Island seventh grader "wasting away, looking for folk music on the radio, and I found Bob. He told me the Vietnam War was wrong, which nobody on Staten Island was saying. He was my friend when I had no friends. I hardly went to high school, because I would take NoDoz to stay up and listen to him and Abbie Hoffman and Marshall Efron. It was like they were planning a revolution and I heard it all."

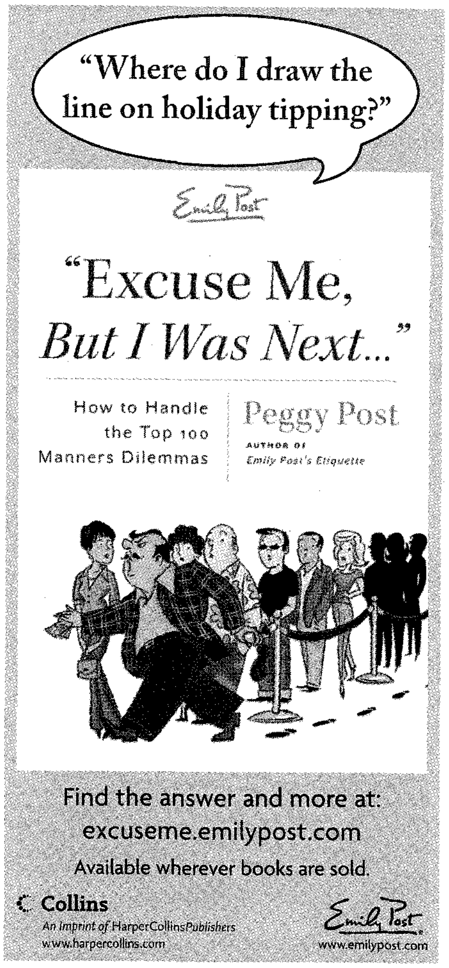
When Tofte was fourteen, she visited WBAI and caught a glimpse of Fass through the studio glass. Nine years later, while working as an astrologer, she dropped by for a closer look. "I got knocked over by the energy," she said. Eventually, she finagled a job as the station's record librarian and got to know Fass. They have lived together since the nineteen-eighties and were married in 1997.

Listeners went to sleep with Fass on the radio and would wake to find him still there at dawn. But he did get out, and one evening in 1966 he visited some friends from an artists' collective that staged a multimedia show in a hangar at John F. Kennedy International Airport. A week later, Fass stumbled upon a group of stoned hippies staring at the huge Alexander Calder mobile installed in the International Arrivals Building. "What a great place for a party," Fass recalled thinking. He went on the air and invited his audience to show itself.

Back in the fifties, Fass's radio hero, Jean Shepherd, suffering a moment of overwhelming doubt, had asked his listeners to gather in an event he called the Milling. Hundreds of people convened on a dark street corner in lower Manhattan, and just stood around. The police arrived and asked questions, and, as Shepherd had instructed them, the listeners declined, politely, to respond. Then, without further communication, the listeners went home. Shepherd returned the next night to his studio, revived. Now Fass, similarly secluded in his windowless, soundproof room, asked his audience to join him at a Fly-In.

Night after night, Fass talked up the idea, blending his descriptions of the gathering with songs about flying and airplanes. On February 11, 1967, thousands of people showed up at the J.F.K. arrivals building—some news accounts say three thousand, Fass says seven thousand—and proceeded to dance and sing, hand one another flowers and candy, smoke pot, and watch one another. The *Village Voice* declared the event a "tribal" phenomenon, and Fass celebrated it on the air as "a colossal amount of human connection. . . . We're planning another one at your house."

Emboldened by that success, Fass teamed up with other Village activists to organize a New York version of the Be-In, at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Fass recruited thousands of listeners to meet in Central Park's Sheep Meadow to build bonfires, fly kites, chant "Love," trade flowers, and simply be there—with radios tuned to WBAI. Fass began summoning his audience to action almost nightly. They staged a Sweep-In, scrubbing Third Street on the Lower East Side, as Fass said, "with brooms and mops and brushes, until it was perfectly clean." Fass and his listeners raised bail money for hippies who'd been arrested for sitting on the grass and playing instruments in Tompkins Square Park. They held a Milk-In to buy neces-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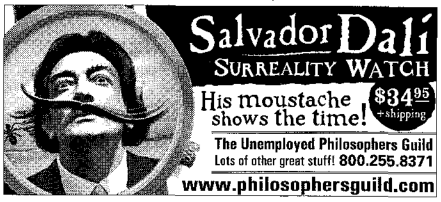
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sities when the Visiting Mothers day-care service on the Lower East Side ran out of money.

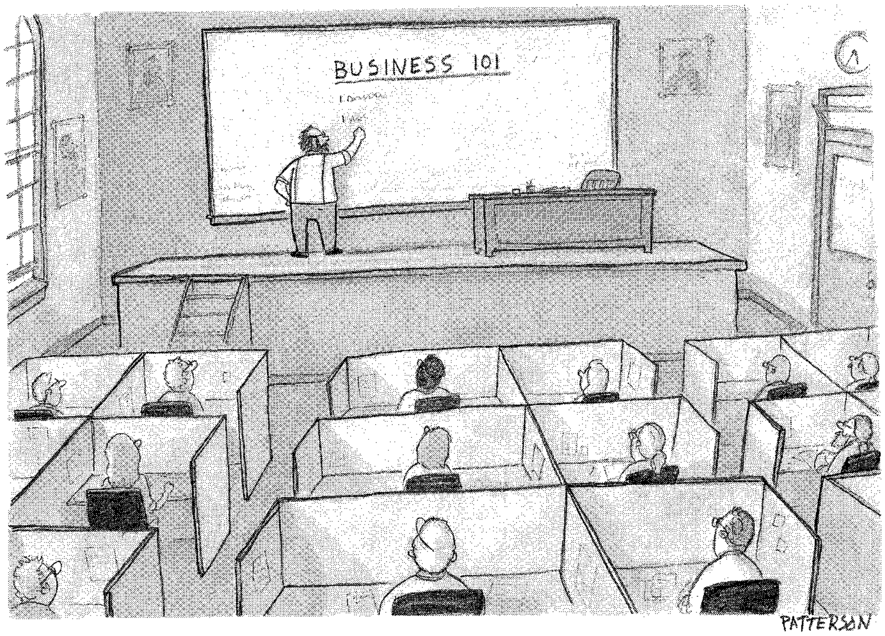
By the end of 1967, Fass's listeners were a street force, celebrated by Abbie Hoffman, who spoke on "Radio Unnameable" about the magic that might result if acidheads and political activists joined together. Hoffman, a regular on the show from 1963 until his suicide, in 1989, played the fool in the mainstream media, creating characters and wearing outrageous costumes to win attention. But on Fass's show he often dropped the antics and talked strategy. "Radio Unnameable" became the very public yet comfortably private gathering place for organizers of the antiwar movement.

On New Year's Eve, in 1967, at Hoffman's apartment, with everyone smoking marijuana and listening to Fass, the conversation focussed on how to radicalize the hippies. By the end of the night, Hoffman called Fass on the air and said, "Hey, we're yippies now." The Youth International Party needed a coming-out bash, and Fass joined Hoffman and friends to promote the Yip-In at Grand Central Station, a rehearsal for the demonstration the following summer which the yippies were planning for the Democratic National Convention, in Chicago.

"Why Grand Central?" a reporter asked at the press conference announcing the event.

"It's central, man," a yippie replied.

During the Vietnam and Watergate years, membership numbers at WBAI soared, as did listener donations. But, as the nation's political street battles receded, the station came to sound like an artifact of another era. Listener donations declined. In 1977, with audience numbers down by almost half from the peak, of some two hundred thousand, during the antiwar protests, WBAI planned to adopt a format with more music and talk aimed at Hispanics and blacks. Appalled, a small band of WBAI staff members invaded the station's transmitter room, atop the Empire State Building, locked themselves in, and took control of the airwaves, playing Dylan and Pete Seeger songs between denunciations of the unilateral and drastic changes in programming. Management cut off the power and WBAI remained silent for fifty days.



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The architects of WBAI's new sound argued that Fass and friends were denying reality. "We've been trying to be the voice of a nonexistent movement," the foundation's vice-president, Peter Franck, said. WBAI's new program director, Pablo Guzman, the former minister of information for the Puerto Rican radical group the Young Lords, proposed to drop many long-standing programs. The old programming, Guzman told the *Times*, was "so white-oriented it was shocking—a disgrace." The new station manager, Anna Kosof, derided the old WBAI staff as "a commune. It's a way of life of the sixties, and they haven't got out of that."

For weeks, Fass and other staffers, often joined by listeners, occupied WBAI's studio, in the former church on East Sixty-second Street. How could it be that Fass and other WBAI veterans were now being called reactionaries, accused of standing in the way of the same blacks and Hispanics for whom they thought they'd been fighting? The answer, Fass was told, was simple: the sixties were over.

Fass insisted that his show was no nostalgia trip. "Radio Unnameable," he said, "was a place where everyone could talk, where things happen, where something is diminished when you know what to expect." Wasn't that what the station was all about? When police finally took back the building, the last five holdouts, Fass among them, were arrested and charged with criminal contempt.

In the aftermath of the standoff, Guzman quit, calling WBAI a home for "racism and mediocrity." Fass was banned from the station, after he refused to sign a statement of regret for his role in the uprising. For the next five years, his nights stretched before him, empty and quiet. Most of his friends at the station had moved on. Many chose a more middle-class existence, by signing on at National Public Radio. "I tried to do things for public radio, but I didn't like having to read something that had to last thirty-eight seconds exactly," Fass said. "I wasn't used to being vetted." NPR, he continued, "gets on my nerves because it's so unspontaneous. You have the feeling if someone giggles there's a management conference on whether to edit it out."

"Bob never compromised," Larry Josephson, the former morning host and station manager, said. Instead, Fass collected unemployment, and then he didn't. He acted in a couple of Off-Broadway shows, and then he didn't. He made voice-overs for commercials, and then he decided that that wasn't quite right. He had a public-access cable show for a while, called "If I Can't Dance, You Can Keep Your Revolution." He worked in telephone solicitation, selling tickets to productions at Lincoln Center. For a long time, he didn't do much of anything. He was, he said, very depressed.

Fass started writing about his past,

about his grandmother, who knew Emma Goldman and who gave birth to Fass's father on a Manhattan street during rites for a rabbi whose funeral procession came under attack by a rival sect. These were stories that Fass had never told on the air; the era of radio as confessional had not yet arrived. "When I started the show, I was in therapy," he said. "I decided to save the personal stuff for the therapist. Figured I was paying for it." Fass began to wonder—were he ever to get back on the air—if he should talk about what in his own past led him to believe in using radio to magnify small voices. Maybe, he said, radio's future in this new media landscape is to create connections among listeners who spend their days in disparate niche communities.

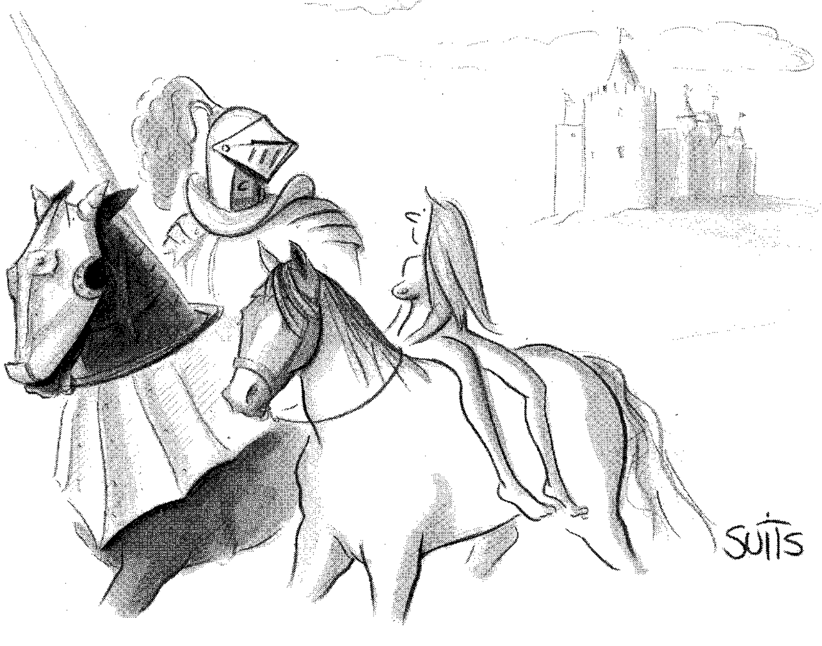
A few years into his exile from WBAI, Fass wondered whether anyone remembered who he'd been and what he'd done. He placed a tiny ad in *The Nation:* "Good morning cabal. If you ever listened until 'Bye-bye,' I wuv you, you are a member of the cabal. Where are you? What are you doing?" Fass got hundreds of letters from all over the world.

In 1982, a new set of managers at WBAI let Fass back on the air, but his show would never again be on five nights a week. His old following stayed loyal: Hoffman called in from his underground hideouts; his vasectomy operation was broadcast live on "Radio Unnameable." And Fass found new causes. In the eighties, he created a faux-grassroots group called Homeless for Reagan, which he and his callers soon transformed into a real charity working on behalf of people displaced by gentrification.

Some staffers at WBAI today don't relate to Fass's notion that truth is served by allowing any and all views to float over the airwaves. The various ethnic and political factions at the station each want to present their own truth. What listeners hear is a cacophony of righteous voices, often turned inward against others at the station. Ibrahim Gonzalez, whose show follows Fass's, said, "It became like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, complete with endless debates over the right of return, over who held the rights to a time slot."

Even those at WBAI who admired Fass wondered whether he ought to move on. "When he came back, everyone had heard of these great programs, about his relationship with Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg," the station's program director, Bernard White, said. "People were waiting for his greatness to manifest itself. And there were some magic moments, but, mostly, what was once magic became nostalgia. The old sixties crowd says the station is less intelligent now. And it is less dynamic, because it reflects the times we are in. There's no real challenge to the government now, and the station reflects that."

For years, White and Fass squabbled.



"Not now. I have a siege."

Fass wanted more airtime. He wanted to be paid. (He'd received a salary until 1977, if sporadically.) White thought Fass's show was a throwback. Fass increasingly sensed that old white Jewish radicals were no longer welcome at WBAI. Then, in December, 2000, Pacifica took over WBAI, appointed a new general manager, changed the locks on the station's door, placed guards outside the studios, fired White, and banned several employees and volunteers from the airwaves. The "Christmas coup" sparked months of protests, lawsuits, and on-air battles. Through it all, Fass not only sided with White but made his show a forum for the exiled program director. "Even when Bob was specifically ordered not to have me on, he did," White said.

After a legal settlement restored White to his job, he and Fass returned to their separate corners. "Bob's actions since the coup have been in line with the aspirations of the racist elements that want to take the station back," White said. "Bob's bitter because he's seen his colleagues move on and make money and be secure. He's fought the good fight and he's in the winter of his life. He has no work, no pension. I do feel sorry for him, because I can see that same future coming toward me."

WBAI has never paid Fass more than a hundred and seventy-five dollars a week. For many years, he lived on Social Security and the salary his wife made as a research librarian at a Manhattan law firm. The couple moved to Staten Island. (Last year, after Lynnie lost her job and the couple fell into even rougher times financially, friends and listeners staged a rent party and raised twenty-two thousand dollars for Fass.)

Fass recognizes that clinging to WBAI prevented him from making a decent living. But he knows that no other place will let him do what he does. So he stays, even if he is not especially wanted. "For years now, there's been this received wisdom at WBAI that you have to get rid of these old people," Janet Coleman, the station's arts director and another veteran of WBAI's glory days, said. "You do question your sanity for staying."

It is finally Thursday night. Fass hustles into the studios of WBAI a few minutes before midnight, weighed down by bulging canvas bags stuffed with news clippings, CDs, tapes, and maybe a vinyl record or two. He passes a cluster of young people in ratty T-shirts debating with a couple of old West Indian men about prophets and the future of the nation-state. A program about women's consciousness is ending. "We started out with the notion that we can awake within ourselves a passionate awareness of the molecules of emotion," the announcer says, in a small, sleepy voice. A news report refers to the United States as "an occupying power" and to the Chief Executive as "President-Select Bush."

Fass settles in behind the microphone. He waits through five seconds of silence, a quiet long enough to induce mortal panic in any broadcast professional. But, at exactly the moment when it seems as if the station had fallen off the air, Fass leans into the microphone, inhales deeply and loudly, waits another long second, and, in a soft tone, says, "This is WBAI in New York City. Preceding program brought to you on recording. This is 'Radio Unnameable.' My name's Bob Fass." Then he closes his eyes for a moment and, in barely more than a whisper, says, "Good morning, cabal." If you're listening in bed somewhere, you hardly know what year it is. Fass has invited Eric Levine, a folksinger who has been coming on the show for twenty years, and Levine has brought along Gina Tlamsa, a Celtic flutist who started listening to Fass when she was a kid babysitting in other people's apartments. Levine will sing his "Ballad of the C.I.A.," which has all the subtlety of a grenade. There will be songs blaming landlords and lawyers for the miseries of the poor, and songs comparing George W. Bush to Richard Nixon.

And then, at twelve-thirty-four, Fass interrupts the musicians in mid-tune. "There's a caller who says something important is happening," he says. He punches up Line 1 with repeated jabs of his thick fingers; technical grace was never his strong point.

"I'm in the Fort Greene housing project in Brooklyn," the caller says, "and there's a riot situation. They have the block blocked off. They murdered a young man in the back."

"What's happening now?" Fass asks, and the caller describes police officers pointing guns and helicopters circling overhead.

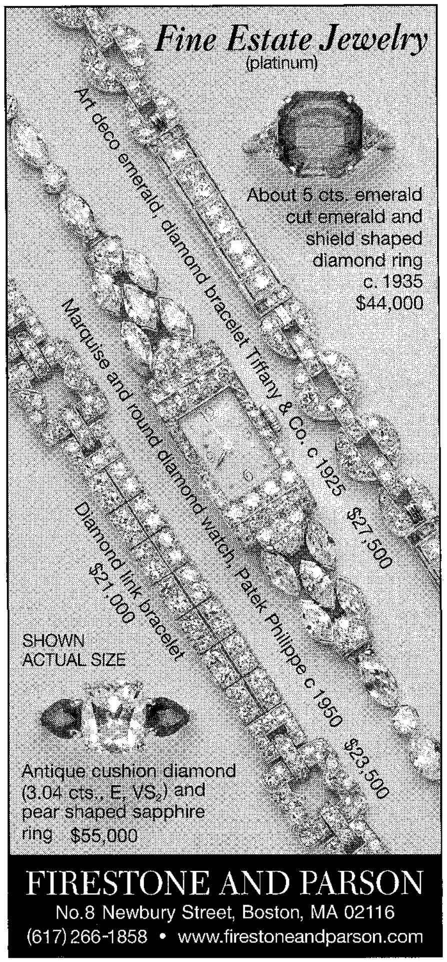
"I didn't know who else to call," the caller says. Fass asks her to find a friend who's closer to the action and put that person on the phone.

"Is there someone who can call us from the street?" he asks. Within a couple of minutes, four phone lines light up. Over the next hour, Fass talks to one caller after another and teases out the story, about how a plainclothes detective shot a man whom he'd seen shoot another man on the street, and about the rage in the escalating confrontations between residents and police.

"You want a presence, people to witness what's going on?" Fass asks one caller, and now six lines light up, and listeners volunteer to go and watch what the police are doing. Callers from all over the city talk about how it's hard to afford an apartment even in the ghetto, and other callers relay eyewitness accounts of the original shooting, and now eight lines are flashing, and a caller, Maria, reads from the real-estate listings in the *Times*, noting that addresses in Fort Greene are now being called Brooklyn Heights—after the affluent, mostly white neighborhood nearby.

The callers are Caribbean and Hispanic and African-American, and they thank Fass for being there. He says nothing but "You're on the air," and punches more buttons, putting callers on the radio alone and in pairs and in small groups. They debate the future of the city and talk about organizing a march. Their conversation shifts to how jobs are being sent to Bangladesh and India, and when you call American Express or America Online the customer-service person is often halfway around the world.

The next morning, when Fass wakes up, there are a few inches in the *Times* about the incident, under the headline "POLICE KILL MAN THEY SAY HAD JUST KILLED ANOTHER." In the *Post*, the headline is "NARCS GUN DOWN MURDERER." Fass reviews the show, concluding that if he could have stayed on the air only another few hours he might have been able to help the Fort Greene residents organize themselves into a credible protest force. But there will be no more hours until next Thursday at midnight, when the mike goes live. "I like now," Fass said. "Nostalgia means sickness for the past. Past, future—these are things that cannot be altered. But the moment—the immediate moment—that's what it's about." ♦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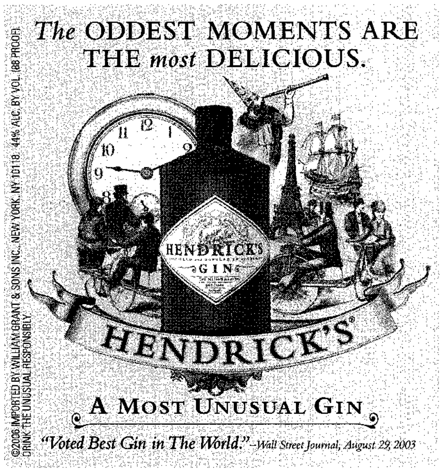
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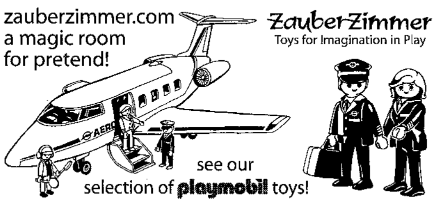
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ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

MAD AS HELL

Lou Dobbs's populist crusade.

BY KEN AULETTA

Regular viewers of "Lou Dobbs Tonight," on CNN, might be surprised at the venue that Dobbs chose for lunch not long ago: the Grill Room of the Four Seasons, a midtown bastion of the very same political and business "élites" that he denounces daily on his television program. The Four Seasons is the enduring commissary of the Old Guard, where Henry Kissinger waves to the former Citigroup C.E.O. Sandy Weill, there is limo-lock at the side door, and the regulars have their checks sent to the office. Dobbs's Town Car left him at the door, on East Fifty-second Street, and the restaurant's co-owner, Julian Nicolini, embraced him that day as warmly as when he welcomed, among others, Stephen Schwarzman, the chairman and C.E.O. of the Blackstone Group; Nelson Peltz, the C.E.O. of Trian Partners; Edgar Bronfman, Sr., the former chairman and C.E.O. of Seagram; and Mortimer Zuckerman, the real-estate developer and publisher of the *News*. Nicolini led Dobbs to one of five choice banquettes, and Dobbs settled in, looking very much at home.

Dobbs is sixty-one, and his chubby face has a rosy glow. His blond hair is lacquered in place, his black wing tips are impeccably buffed. Other club members having lunch that day—the Nobel Prize winner James Watson, Bronfman, Peltz, the movie producer Harvey Weinstein—stopped at the table to say hello. It is the kind of welcome that one might have expected for an earlier incarnation of Lou Dobbs—the Harvard-educated anchor of CNN's "Moneyline," which in the nineteen-nineties served as a sort of video clubhouse for corporate America. But, in the past four years or so, Dobbs has been reborn as a populist—a full-throated champion of "the little guy," an evangelical opponent of liberal immigration laws. His hour-long program, which airs at six, features Dobbs in a role that combines Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan. On the air, he boomingly assails the upper management of corporate America for its "outrageous" greed, pay packages, and corruption, its opposition to increasing the minimum wage, its hiring of "illegal aliens," its ties to "Communist China," and its eagerness to send American jobs overseas.

The new Lou Dobbs often surprises those who recall the old Lou Dobbs of "Moneyline." Daniel Henninger, the deputy editor of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, wrote, "Old admirers are aghast. It's as if whatever made Linda Blair's head spin around in 'The Exorcist' had invaded the body of Lou Dobbs and left him with the brain of Dennis Kucinich," a reference to the left-wing Ohio congressman and former Presidential aspirant. After an angry altercation on the show with James Glassman, a former *New Republic* publisher and current conservative supply-sider, Glassman said of Dobbs, "How did he transform from a business sycophant to a raving populist?" Glassman's answer was that Dobbs had begun to "demagogue these issues." (In questioning Glassman's economic theories on his program, Dobbs accused him of talking "like a cult member.") As if to answer such critics, Dobbs has recently published a book whose title is almost as long as the menu at the Grill Room: "War on the Middle Class: How the Government, Big Business, and Special Interest Groups Are Waging War on the American Dream and HOW TO FIGHT BACK."

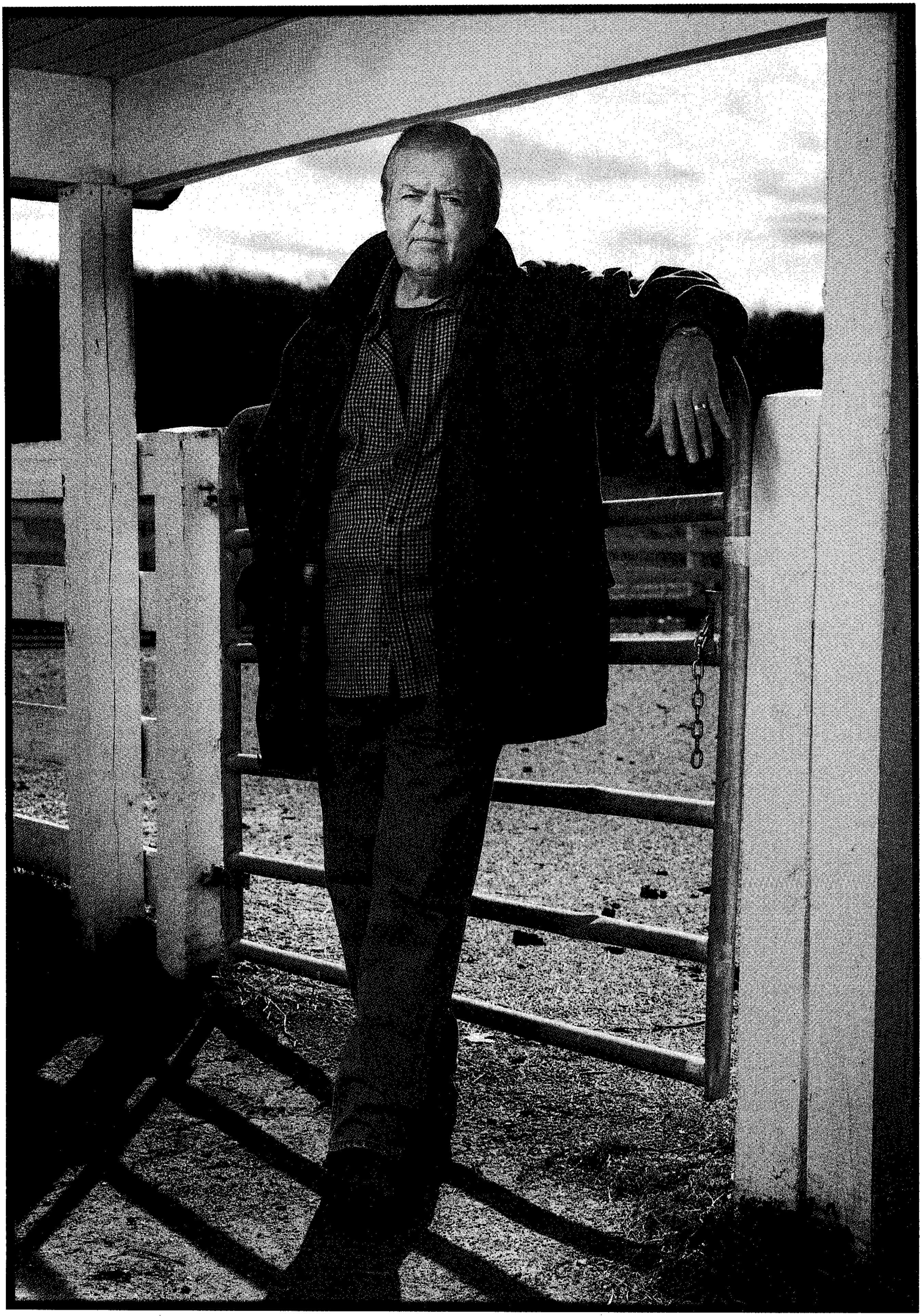
On the cover, Dobbs is standing—hands in pockets, feet apart—like a sentry protecting the boundaries of decency and the nation. At CNN, alone among the cable network's anchors, he is allowed to express his opinions without borders. "I'm never neutral on any issue that affects the common good, our national interest, and working men and women of this country," he writes. In many ways, Dobbs and Bill O'Reilly, of Fox News, who in 2003 wrote a book entitled "Who's Looking Out for You?," are kindred spirits. Dobbs, who lives on a three-hundred-acre farm in a prosperous part of New Jersey, admires his own capacity for compassion and self-effacement. His audience, he writes, knows that he cares "more about them and their lives than about being invited to the White House or playing golf with C.E.O.s and celebrities."

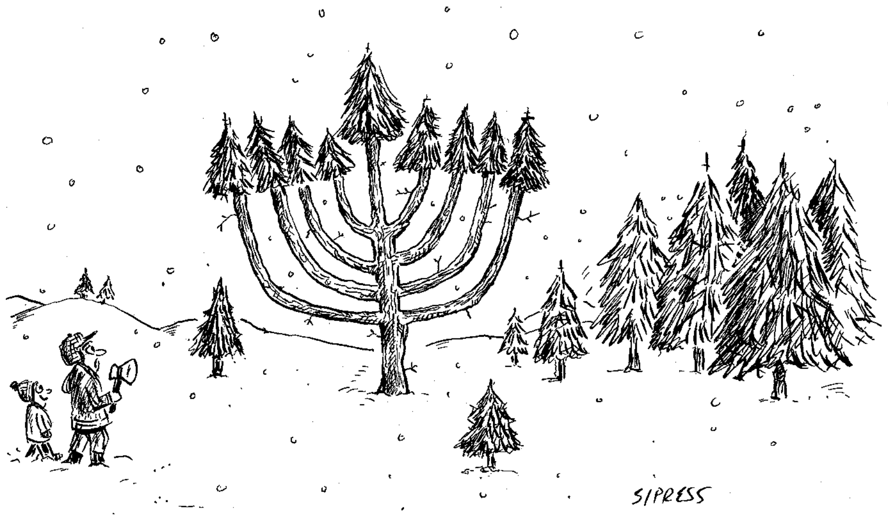
For most of its first half hour, "Lou Dobbs Tonight" contains more domestic and international news than does each of the three major network's broadcasts, and Dobbs fills the role of the well-informed anchorman. Yet he also teases his audience, with headlines from stories that run in the second half hour, which is dominated by what Dobbs's executive producer, Jim McGinnis, refers to as "brands"—segments with names like "Broken Borders," "Homeland Insecurity," "War on the Middle Class," "Exporting America," and "The Best Government Money Can Buy."

"It's very different from any program you'll see on TV, by intention," Dobbs said, as we ordered the fifty-six-dollar Dover sole. "What you won't see on our broadcast is 'fair and balanced journalism.' You will not see 'objective journalism.' The truth is not 'fair and balanced.' There is a nonpartisan, independent reality that doesn't give a damn, frankly, what two Democrats and two Republicans think about anything or say about anything."

The cable-news universe is relatively small. About eight hundred thousand people watch "Lou Dobbs Tonight" (about nine million watch the "Nightly News," on NBC), and in its time slot it

Dobbs rarely sees both sides of an argument: "Everything I believe, I believe unequivocally." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.





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lags behind Brit Hume's show, on Fox, which has about a million and a half viewers. But Dobbs is narrowing the gap, and his news program is one of the handful on cable whose audiences are growing, rather than shrinking. The highest-rated cable news program is "The O'Reilly Factor," on Fox, which averages about two million viewers, and Fox continues to lead CNN in the ratings, with MSNBC a distant third. A program's ranking is affected by the length of time that viewers stay with it, and news shows that do best tend to have opinionated anchors, like Fox's O'Reilly and Sean Hannity; MSNBC's Keith Olbermann, whose audience has increased by two-thirds in the past year; and Dobbs, whose broadcast has drawn twenty-two per cent more viewers in the past twelve months. In October, the network announced that "Lou Dobbs Tonight" would expand from five nights to seven, and Dobbs was named one of CNN's four Election Night anchors.

Dobbs has been with CNN since Ted Turner launched the cable network from Atlanta, in 1980, and both Dobbs and CNN have changed in the intervening years. Turner once liked to contrast CNN with the broadcast networks by saying that "news was the star" and that CNN expunged opinions from its news. Today, CNN heavily promotes its star anchors—particularly Dobbs, Larry King, whose show airs at nine, and Anderson Cooper, who comes on at ten. Cooper regularly travels to trouble spots and shares with viewers his personal responses to situations, and one longtime CNN employee said of his show, "It's almost a fact-free zone. It's a feeling zone."

Unlike Fox, whose identity among its core viewers is often described as a celebration of conservatives, CNN seems to have adopted a "We're on your side" stance as a way to boost ratings. It was encouraged by Dobbs, but also by Cooper, who expressed his outrage at the federal response to Hurricane Katrina, and by Jack Cafferty, in cranky commentaries on Wolf Blitzer's "The Situation Room." For nine nights in October, CNN ran a series called "Broken Government," as well as two hour-long Dobbs town-hall meetings—the first on the "forgotten middle class," the second on illegal immigration. CNN's ratings improved dramatically, particularly among the most desirable demographic, twenty-five- to fifty-four-year-olds.

Jon Klein, the president of CNN in the United States, told me that when he arrived at the cable network, soon after the 2004 election, there was a perception that CNN would become more like Fox and that news, as he put it, "had to be glitzy and a diversion"—a series of tabloid narratives with constant updates. "No one wanted to cover Natalee Holloway, but they thought they had to," Klein says, referring to the teen-ager who disappeared in Aruba. "That's not said from some moral high ground. It's business. If everyone else on television is doing it, don't you want to do something else?" With its excitable coverage of these stories, Klein believed that CNN "was alienating its audience," and damaging its credibility. From the digital world, where he once worked and where he could chart what people watched and when interest waned, he "learned that people get tired of stories easily." Although CNN hardly ignores the more diverting stories, Klein wanted people at the network to "decide for ourselves what is important," and CNN to distinguish itself through what he called "differentiation."

Klein, who is forty-eight, spent nearly two decades in various capacities at CBS News, where he produced both serious work (overseeing "60 Minutes" and winning a Peabody Award for "48 Hours," which is emphasized in his official biography) and less-serious news (the softening of "48 Hours," which goes unmentioned). In 1999, after leaving CBS, he founded a broadband video company, the FeedRoom, which tells companies how to use video on the Internet.

With a worldwide staff of four thousand, CNN had more reporting resources than any of its competitors. When the tsunami struck Southeast Asia in December of 2004, Klein says, he worked with his CNN international counterpart, and "We gang-tackled the story. We asked correspondents not to do standups but to find real human stories, to do storytelling." He says that he quickly took note of Anderson Cooper's talent for displaying empathy (Cooper replaced Aaron Brown in November, 2005), and also decided that Dobbs's program was fine as it was. "I committed 'benign neglect' on Lou," Klein told me.

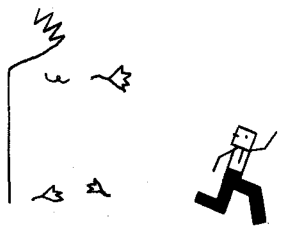
For some years, CNN has billed itself as "The most trusted name in news." (A recent Pew poll, however, suggested that there is little difference in credibility among the cable news networks; the poll also noted that the number of Americans who said they believed "all or most" of what CNN reported has fallen from forty-two per cent to twenty-eight per cent since 1998.) Under Klein, CNN has, once again, placed greater emphasis on its chief international correspondent, Christiane Amanpour, and given more airtime to John King, the chief national correspondent. After largely abandoning documentaries in recent years, the network plans to produce twenty-four hours in 2007; among the topics that the scheduled programs will cover are Iraq and the environment. After it became clear that CBS would choose Katie Couric to replace Dan Rather as anchor, Klein hired the CBS White House correspondent John Roberts, who had once been in contention for Rather's job. He recruited *Time's* Baghdad bureau chief, Michael Ware, as well as senior broadcast network-news producers: David Doss, formerly of ABC and NBC, to executive-produce Anderson Cooper; and Victor Neufeld, a veteran of CBS and ABC, to executive-produce Paula Zahn, who anchors the news at 8 P.M. He also replaced "Inside Politics" and the shouting match "Crossfire" with the more news-oriented "Situation Room."

The showman in Klein competes with the newsman and, in the atmosphere of cable news, the showman often wins the contest. "There's no question that Jon Klein wants more edge," a senior CNN employee told me. "Klein is the most personality-driven manager we've had." This employee respects Klein "as a leader" for returning the network to its news roots but worries that Klein is drawing the wrong conclusion from Dobbs's improved ratings. "When we did the 'Broken Government' series," the senior employee said, "in the first conference call he said, 'I don't want preconceived solutions, but, when you reach a conclusion, don't be afraid to express it. I don't want 'He said, she said.'"

CNN's news coverage coexists uneasily with its Dobbs-led populism. Among the viewers who are less than happy with the network's current direction is Ted Turner, who told me, "CNN in the U.S. is quite a bit different than it was. They've gone more into emphasizing personality, and to some degree, particularly in the case of Lou Dobbs, they've encouraged him to promote himself and his own ideas to create a cult of personality to increase the ratings." Turner paused for a moment before adding that Lou Dobbs is "a very talented newscaster, and he's personally a friend of mine. Having said that, I personally think he's gone too far inserting his opinions, for my taste."

Dobbs often describes himself as "a kid who grew up poor" in rural Texas. He was the younger of two sons, born in September, 1945, in Childress (pop. 6,000), not far from Amarillo. His father was a partner in a small propane business, and his mother was a bookkeeper. When Lou was twelve, the propane business collapsed and the family, in search of a better livelihood, moved to a farm in Rupert, Idaho, where Lou attended public schools. His teachers encouraged him to apply to Harvard, from which he graduated in 1967, with a degree in economics.

His first job was working in federal anti-poverty programs in Boston and Washington, D.C. Dobbs recalls, "I decided to go out and make some money. I decided I wasn't changing the world." He then moved to Los Angeles, where he worked as a cash-management specialist for Union Bank, earning what was then an excellent salary of thirty thousand dollars a year to come up with ways for companies to manage their capital more efficiently. In 1969, he married a former high-school sweetheart; in 1970, the first of their two sons was born. But Dobbs grew restless at the bank, particularly after spending time with two friends who were journalists, and who, he says, "seemed to be having so much fun." He had been saving money, and moved his family to Yuma, Arizona, where he'd heard about a job as a police and fire reporter for a radio station. His imposing physical presence and booming voice had been quickly noticed, and he soon began working with the affiliated television station. "I found what I really loved to do," he says. His starting salary was seventy-five dollars a week. In the mid-seventies, he was hired as a television anchor-reporter, first in Phoenix and then in Seattle. At the end of 1979, a recruiter called to ask if he would be interested in the all-news cable network that Ted Turner was starting. Dobbs liked the idea of challenging the three broadcast networks, and Turner hired him to anchor a half-hour business newscast. On the Chicken Noodle Network, as CNN was sometimes called then, Dobbs was the youngest anchor. He is the only one from that period who is still with CNN.



Dobbs soon became a member of the network's executive committee, and eventually supervised a staff of more than three hundred, overseeing all of CNN's business coverage. He was also put in charge of business news on CNN.com, and became the president of CNNfn, a business cable network. His main job, however, was to anchor the half-hour "Moneyline" program, which in 1984 moved to New York. In 1998, it was given an additional half hour, and renamed the "Moneyline News Hour with Lou Dobbs," allowing Dobbs to offer a wider range of reports.

Dobbs's personal life had undergone a few changes during these years. In 1981, he divorced his wife. The following year, he married Debi Lee Segura, a sports anchor and a reporter for CNN; in 1988, Segura gave birth to twin girls. Dobbs bought his farm in Sussex, New Jersey, a ninety-minute commute to CNN's studios in Manhattan, where he raised and rode horses, joined a country club, and collected guns. (His two sons, both businessmen, live in nearby Sparta; his daughters were recently accepted at Harvard.)

On the air, Dobbs celebrated capitalism and helped conjure the Internet bubble of the nineties. In the 2000 book "The Fortune Tellers," Howard Kurtz wrote that "Moneyline," like CNBC's "Squawk Box" and much of the financial press, sought "a nonstop flow of tips, touts, picks, and pans to lure consumers with the idea that they just might get in on the Next Big Thing." CNN billed "Moneyline" as the business-news program watched "by more C.E.O.'s than any other," and its audience was so demographically desirable that CNN was able to charge advertisers some of the steepest cost-per-thousand rates in television.

Dobbs flew on a private plane and befriended the well-to-do—among them Henry Kravis, the billionaire and leverage-buyout specialist. He accepted speaking fees to appear at corporate retreats. He was paid to do promotional videos for Shearson Lehman Brothers, Paine Webber, and the Philadelphia Stock Ex-change, and when these relationships became public and Dobbs was asked if this wasn't a conflict of interest, he said, "That is a silly, silly question. Would I do it if I thought I were compromising anything?" Nevertheless, Dobbs said that he would return the money, and insists that his practice today is to donate such fees to charity. Tom Johnson, the chairman and C.E.O. of CNN News Group, expressed full confidence in Dobbs.

Inside CNN, Dobbs was known for his intelligence as well as for having a nasty streak. There were stories of how he verbally abused people, including the time, reported by Howard Kurtz, that he was said to have ordered a short producer to stand on a chair so that he—Dobbs is six-feet-two—could scream at him standing eyeball to eyeball. "It's absolute bullshit," Dobbs says. "It never happened," although he concedes that he was "a very tough editorial manager."

Dobbs met his volatile match in Rick Kaplan, who became CNN's U.S. president in 1997, and by 1999 the two were barely speaking. Dobbs was leery of Kaplan, who had been a news producer at CBS and the executive producer of both "World News Tonight" and "Nightline," at ABC, but who also happened to be a friend of President Clinton's. "I didn't agree with the journalism he was doing," Dobbs said. "In my judgment, he was clearly partisan. He was pushing Clinton stories." Kaplan responded by saying that most of CNN's Clinton stories were negative. He thought that Dobbs was a prima donna—"just a very difficult person to deal with." He added, "Lou doesn't think he's opinionated. He just thinks he's stating the truth."

Their final clash came in May of 1999, while Dobbs was anchoring "Moneyline." CNN, like Fox and MSNBC, had planned to cover a speech that Clinton was giving in Littleton, Colorado, after the shootings at Columbine High School, where two teen-age gunmen killed twelve students and a teacher, and then committed suicide. Clinton's speech fell in the middle of Dobbs's program, and the broadcast cut away to Colorado. Kaplan was watching at home and heard Clinton say to the families, "There's something you all can do," and then the President was cut off and CNN returned to "Moneyline." Dobbs says that he considered the President's speech a staged event, and ordered his producer to return to the studio. Kaplan told me, "Tell me what journalistic reason there was not to cover the President at Columbine soon after the shootings? Everyone else was covering it. . . . There are two sides to almost every story in the world, but not to that one." Kaplan countermanded Dobbs's order, and Dobbs, at that point, looked into the camera and told his audience, "CNN President Rick Kaplan wants us to return to Littleton."

Several days later, Dobbs announced that he was leaving CNN to start a Web site, Space.com, devoted to collecting news about space: technology, astronomy, NASA missions, and more; a co-investor in this effort was Venrock Associates, the venture-capital firm affiliated with the Rockefeller family. "I'd had it," Dobbs says. "I just couldn't take the hassle. I was not having fun." There was another, unspoken reason for his departure: Dobbs wanted to stay on the air at CNN while also investing in Space.com, and CNN officials believed that this would entail a clear conflict of interest. How could he objectively cover the dot-com world when he had a stake in its success? Ted Turner could not persuade Dobbs to back down, and he quit.

Dobbs had other reasons to be unhappy: CNBC, the NBC business cable network, was building an audience throughout the day, and by evening it often had more viewers than "Moneyline." Many C.E.O.s now appeared first on CNBC. Maria Bartiromo, a reporter whom Dobbs had declined to make a correspondent, and who had been given her own show on CNBC, was drawing a large audience. Dobbs was annoyed that Time Warner, CNN's corporate parent, had refused to invest more in CNNfn. Dobbs became the C.E.O. of Space.com, and soon signed on with NBC to produce a financial newsletter, host an NBC radio program, and become a "guest" financial commentator on both NBC and CNBC, apparently allowing him to skirt a non-competitive clause in his severance agreement. At CNN, meanwhile, "Moneyline" continued, but it was slowly losing viewers.

By April, 2001, the dot-com bubble had burst and Rick Kaplan had left CNN. That month, Dobbs announced that he was ending his association with NBC, stepping down as the C.E.O. of Space.com, and returning to CNN to be the anchor and managing editor of "Moneyline." Dobbs says, "I never dreamed I'd miss news. I watched the 2000 coverage of the Presidential campaign, and it drove me nuts not to be able to report that story. CNN approached my agent to bring me back." Jeff Gralnick, the executive producer whom Dobbs had recruited to "Moneyline," in 1999, had a somewhat different version of events. In *Electronic Media* in May of 2001, Gralnick wrote that because of new competition from CNBC, Fox News, MSNBC, and Bloomberg News, Dobbs's comeback "is dicey, and achieving success has to be seen as problematic. . . . So why would Dobbs abandon what appeared to be his growing relationship with CNBC and NBC?" Gralnick mentioned the temptation of a high salary, but his conclusion was that "anyone who knows Dobbs or has competed against him or crossed him knows there has to be more to this than just the dollars. Dobbs' return to CNN in the role of 'savior' is the ultimate gotcha." (Today, Dobbs is paid about six million dollars a year by CNN for his TV work and a weekly column that he writes for CNN.com. Space.com never became an Internet triumph, but it remains alive. Gralnick has since become a consultant for NBC News, among others, on new media.)

At first, the impact of Dobbs's return on the program was slight. The ratings for "Moneyline" went up only slightly. Dobbs says that his new, more aggressive tone was prompted by a series of events: corporate scandals (Enron, M.C.I., Adelphi, Tyco); tax cuts that Dobbs felt benefitted the rich at the expense of the middle class, and also generated enormous budget deficits; and, above all, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. After September 11th, Dobbs began wearing a flag pin on his lapel; other changes came gradually.

Dobbs and his producers agreed that the C.E.O. interviews were too soft. "We were doing—I don't want to say puff pieces—but we were just scratching the surface," Jim McGinnis, who has worked with Dobbs for two decades, says. They noticed that their e-mails spiked every time they did pieces on jobs going overseas or on illegal immigration. They began talking about adding more edge to the program. “I was determined to drive the broadcast very hard on issues that affect the quality of life of most Americans,” Dobbs says. As the managing editor, he already enjoyed editorial control. He decided that he also needed more freedom to express his views, and says that he went to Jim Walton, the president of CNN Worldwide, who agreed to relax the network’s no-opinion strictures. “Take it as far as you want,” he says that Walton told him, although viewers had to be informed at the beginning of the program that it would include opinion. Walton confirms this conversation. Opinion is fine, he told me, “if it’s clearly labelled. One of the things our critics said years ago was that CNN is the same”—boring. What Dobbs is doing demonstrates that “CNN is not the same.”

Five correspondents work for Dobbs, and during the second half hour they usually report on a story that Dobbs treats as a scandal, and that he invariably describes as “outrageous,” “alarming,” “idiotic,” “disgusting,” or “sickening.” On the air, Dobbs’s reporters appear deferential. On August 16th, Christine Romans filed a report describing how the town of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, “decided to fight illegal immigration itself” by fining landlords a thousand dollars a day for knowingly renting to illegal aliens and by denying business permits to companies that hire them. In an interview with an A.C.L.U. official who opposed the law, she allowed him a single on-camera sentence; the mayor, who supported the measure, had seven lines and the last word. In a colloquy with Romans in the studio, Dobbs was told that the A.C.L.U. said that if voters were unhappy with federal laws they could always vote for new members of Congress. “Why doesn’t that apply, then, to the local community,” Dobbs asked, “and why are they interfering there, I wonder?”

“That’s a very good point, Lou,” Romans said.

On September 12th, Lisa Sylvester reported from rural Taneytown, Maryland, where the town council was debating whether to legislate English as the official language. Two people who favored the proposal were interviewed, and only one opponent. Dobbs, betraying impatience with those who were opposed to such legislation, said, with a smirk, “As we can often say on this broadcast with seemingly greater frequency, ‘Only in America.’ ” On October 2nd, the correspondent Casey Wian began his report from California, “Lou, there are an estimated seven million illegal aliens now working in the United States. Neither they nor their employers have much to worry about in Congress’s latest efforts to secure the border.” Wian interviewed two critics of corporations who hire illegal aliens and said that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce “refused to provide” a rebuttal, but its Web site says that new regulations would unduly burden employers and would either be “unworkable or cost too much money.” Dobbs thanked Wian and concluded the segment by saying that most lobbyists in Washington try to keep everyone from being “overly burdened; that is, everyone except working men and women and their families in this country.” CNN’s regular correspondents often appear during the first half hour, but not always comfortably. Two days after the midterm elections, at the conclusion of a report from John King, Dobbs looked into the camera and said that he hoped the public had finally “had a bellyful of wedge issues.”

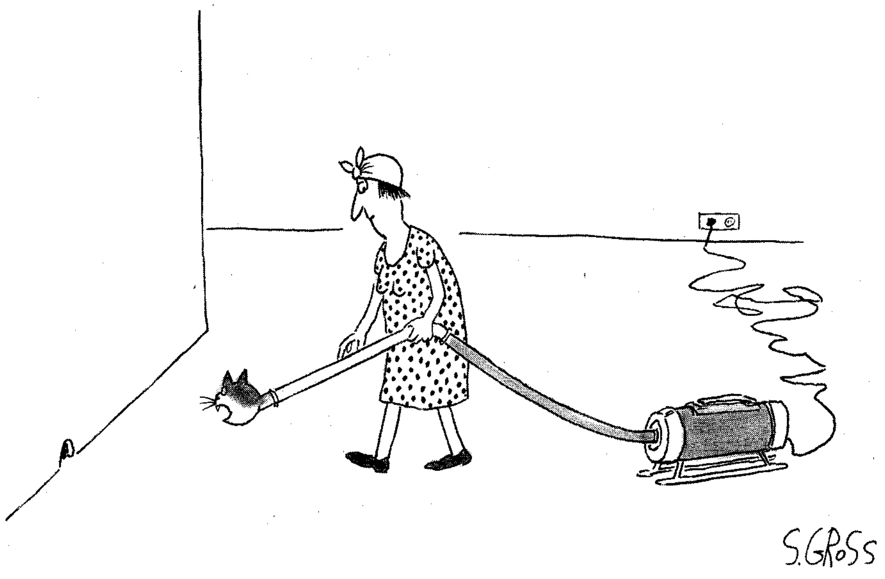
“We can hope, John, can’t we?” Dobbs said.

“We sure can, Lou,” King said, looking uneasy.

The changed emphasis of the program was probably brought about by a mixture of conviction and commerce. With so many choices, McGinnis observes, “there’s a blur out there. If you don’t stand for something and people don’t see what you are, you’re passed by. . . . It’s a business.” By May, 2002, the anniversary of Dobbs’s return, the “Moneyline” ratings had doubled. A year later, the title of the program was changed to “Lou Dobbs Tonight.” When he was asked to describe his ratings success, Dobbs, anticipating skepticism, said, “You’re not going to believe this, but I don’t pay a lot of attention to the numbers. I can tell you the trend is up.”

Dobbs’s actual politics are not easily categorized, and his book, like his nightly program, contains opinions that are both satisfying and infuriating to the right and the left. On Dobbs’s office wall is a framed drawing with a note from Kurt Vonnegut: “You, as the only big-time television personality capable of not only feeling but experiencing sorrow for American working stiffs, are our hero.” The left, to which Vonnegut belongs, can embrace Dobbs for his opposition to big corporations and his support for a higher minimum wage,

“So the ‘ah’ is always followed by a ‘choo’?”



national health insurance, and abortion rights. The right likes him for his views on immigration, political correctness, gun control, the United Nations, and all efforts to limit American sovereignty. Dobbs believes that the middle class, which he has described as being composed of two hundred and fifty million Americans, is taken for granted, an argument that could be challenged by those who point to the growth of middle-class entitlement programs, including Social Security and Medicare, or to the unwillingness of elected officials to offend this constituency by curbing entitlements.

Although Dobbs opposes gun control and supports a woman's right to an abortion, he calls these fake "wedge issues" designed "to excite a certain base." He opposes holidays that celebrate a group rather than a nation, and on his program last spring, when a Hispanic-rights activist defended the displaying of the Mexican flag as an expression of ethnic pride, like that exhibited on St. Patrick's Day, he told her, "Let's be clear. I don't think there should be a St. Patrick's Day."

Dobbs sometimes seems oddly formal; he does not roll up his sleeves, and he puts on a jacket when he leaves his office area. In conversation, he does not harbor much doubt. One day, in his fifth-floor office at CNN's Columbus Circle headquarters, I mentioned that Henry Kissinger has said that many of the decisions he made as Secretary of State were sixty-forty choices, meaning that the opposing argument could claim forty per cent of the truth. Did the "rock hard" truths that Dobbs once told me he believed in exclude the possibility that the other side could claim twenty per cent, or even forty per cent, of the truth?

"In free trade?" he said. "In illegal immigration? In education? No. Everything I believe, I believe unequivocally."

Bill Tucker, a correspondent, has worked with Dobbs for twenty-three years. "There are a lot of dumb bastards in the world," Tucker told me. "Lou is one of the smart ones. There's a big difference working for someone who is smart and engaged." On some issues, Dobbs's program has taken strong positions, Tucker acknowledged, adding that the reporters who work for Dobbs "are expected to file reports within that editorial point of view. The opinions are left to Lou." The correspondents try to get all sides, Tucker went on, but on many of the stories "the quote unquote other side often makes it difficult, because they don't want to coöperate if they know I'm with Dobbs."

One of Jon Klein's stated aims has been to persuade the producers of CNN's various programs to widen their vision (he speaks of them climbing out of their "silos")—to make sure that, say, when Anderson Cooper travelled to Africa other CNN programs, from "The Situation Room" to Paula Zahn's broadcast, would welcome his reports. Yet the dispatches filed by Dobbs's correspondents are rarely welcomed. The senior CNN employee says that "other shows are not comfortable with them," because too many of these reports are on Dobbs's pet subjects and the reporters are widely perceived to be Dobbs's acolytes, feeding him the alarming news that he wants.

"I think he's the most influential political reporter of the time, certainly over the last year," Klein told me. "He's someone politicians ignore at their peril." Klein cited Dobbs's response to the Dubai ports deal: for fifteen evenings, Dobbs spoke about "the outrage" of allowing a Middle Eastern country "with ties to the September 11 terrorists" to operate six American ports. Dobbs certainly was not the only person to raise questions, but the resulting furor eventually prompted Dubai to abandon the plan. *Slate* recently wrote that Dobbs's brand of economic nationalism had been reinforced by the results of the midterm elections, in which many Democrats expressed Dobbsian viewpoints. As for the "illegal immigration" story, Dobbs provided a nightly stage for like-minded members of Congress to express their opinions, an exposure that he believes helped to shift Congress's agenda. Dobbs became so closely identified with the issue that it prompted the humorist Andy Borowitz to offer this fake news story:

> In his toughest stand yet against illegal immigration, President George W. Bush today announced that he would move CNN anchorman Lou Dobbs to the United States' border with Mexico.
>
> For Mr. Bush, who one day earlier had announced that he was moving 10,000 National Guard troops to the Mexican border, the decision to dispatch Mr. Dobbs means that the deployment of Guard troops was no longer necessary.

Dobbs's program also features letters that usually echo his views, as well as poll questions that appear to be slanted, such as "Do you believe illegal aliens who have anchor babies in the United States should be immune from deportation?" In August, ninety-three per cent of those who were asked this question opposed granting immunity. When two U.S. border agents were convicted for shooting at an unarmed man who was smuggling more than seven hundred pounds of marijuana across the Mexican border, Dobbs was incensed. (A jury had found the agents guilty of various counts of assault, among other charges, for firing fifteen shots at the man.) Dobbs returned to this story in many broadcasts. He solicited contributions for the agents. In an August 16th report, he entertained the possibility that "somebody is paying off the government of Mexico" to protect the drug smuggler. He pressed the president of the National Border Patrol Council by asking, "Why isn't there more of a show of support from your members and for other Border Patrol officers?" He inserted the issue into his poll, asking, How many viewers thought this was "a travesty of American justice?" Ninety-six per cent of Dobbs's viewers agreed that it was an outrage.

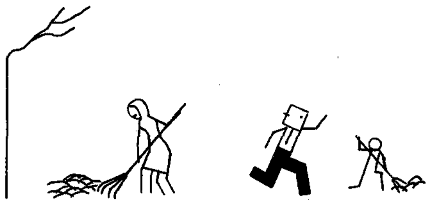
Dobbs's rabidness provokes his critics. Not long ago, the *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman told a law-school audience, "And then you have a blithering idiot like Lou Dobbs, in my view, who's using the platform of CNN in a news frame. . . . This is not news. And so we have a political class not making sense of the world for people and that's why the public . . . is so agitated." *The Economist* said that one might expect "CNN's flagship business-news programme . . . to strive for economic literacy," but, instead, Dobbs greets "every announcement of lost jobs as akin to a terrorist assault"; *The Nation* accused him of "hysteria and jingoism"; the Southern Poverty Law Center said that Dobbs "failed to present mounting and persistent evidence of anti-Hispanic racism" in his reports on anti-immigration groups like the Minutemen; and one Hispanic group urged Time Warner to take Dobbs off the air.

In his new book, Dobbs says of Friedman, "His name calling would bother me more if he were anything more than a tool of international corporatism and a card-carrying member of his own Flat Earth Society." In a weekly column for CNN.com, Dobbs wrote:

> I will tell you it does make a fellow think when attacked so energetically and so personally. But in none of the attacks on my position on outsourcing has a single columnist or news organization seen fit to deal with the facts.
>
> Number one: We're not creating new jobs in the private sector, and that's never happened before in our history. . . . Number two: We haven't had a trade surplus in this country in more than two decades, and our trade deficit continues to soar. Number three: We've lost three million jobs in this country over the last three years. . . . That seems to me, at least, to be more than sufficient evidence for all of us.

Some journalists at CNN worry that Dobbs harms the network's credibility. John King says that he likes Dobbs and admires his talent, but adds, "Lou clearly has strongly held beliefs, and he's decided to share these beliefs. In doing that, does it sometimes cause concern in the company? Yes." Klein admits that he wants to "increase the audience's intensity," but not in the way he believes that Fox has. "They have a clear brand identity," he says of Fox, "which does not afford them as many places to go when their viewership dips. They have a definite right-of-center view of the world. Most of their hard-core viewers are older; sixty-five-plus is their median age"—CNN's median age is about sixty-one. "When you define yourself that way, it's very hard to move to the center without alienating the core audience. I'd rather be playing our hand now. By focussing on news, there is much more we can do." In response to Klein's remarks, a senior Fox executive called him hypocritical for saying that he was pushing serious news, when, according to the executive, he was still running soft news and taking CNN "on a hard tack to the left." The executive said of Dobbs, "He has tapped into strong opinion. He'd be good on Fox."

Klein's immediate goals include boosting the ratings of CNN's "American Morning," which has gained viewers but badly trails "Fox and Friends." (CNN's morning program attracts about half a million viewers; NBC's "Today," the leader among the broadcast networks, reaches six million.) And Klein must give some thought to a replacement for Larry King, who is seventy-three, when King retires. "There isn't going to be another Larry King," Klein says. "And it's not clear that we'll have another interview show." There has been published speculation that he might make a bid for Diane Sawyer, the co-anchor of "Good Morning America," who is eager to escape morning television and seems now to be blocked from an anchor chair at ABC, CBS, or NBC. Klein appears interested; they worked together at CBS. "She has a lot of attributes that would help her fit into CNN," he says. She also has a salary of about twelve million dollars, which CNN could not easily justify for a program whose audience is so much smaller.



CNN's challenge is how to balance its credibility with the emotive direction of cable news. "If you're going to fill 24/7, you have to look for other angles after the basic facts," Rick Kaplan, who, until June, was the president of MSNBC, said. Ted Turner takes a different view. He believes that traditional television news, like print media, is at risk. "We're moving into a 'Brave New World,' like Huxley," Turner says, with "a dramatic reliance on wireless." Turner believes that "somebody has to gather the news," and that CNN has held "the high ground." He remembers that, when he started CNN, it was said that the public didn't want twenty-four-hour cable news. "I certainly hope they are able to maintain its position as the world's most important and trusted network," he told me. "That's a hell of an important position to have. If CNN does keep its quality image above all the temptations to become more 'edgy,' I think they have a very bright future. If they go over the line too far, they risk losing their pole position."

Turner recently criticized journalists who fail to convey a sense of "covering the news from an unbiased" perspective. Turner didn't single anyone out, but Dobbs is sure that he was referring to him. Dobbs says that his old friend and former boss "is an American citizen, and he has a right to say what he thinks," but he rejects the journalistic "neutrality" advocated by Turner. According to Dobbs, viewers expect him to take positions, and like his program because he draws attention to issues that are often ignored by the mainstream press. "I hope that every time the government lies, our broadcast grabs them by the scruff of the neck," he says. ◆

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING

LITTLE HOTTIES

Barbie's new rivals.

BY MARGARET TALBOT

Barbie is forty-seven years old, and forty-seven years is a long time to have been the alpha doll. Over the decades, many competitors have been sent out into the world to get what Mattel's doll had: hugely profitable sovereignty over the imaginations of little girls. Some of these rivals briefly grabbed a small share of the fashion-doll market. The Tammy doll, which had a wholesome teen-aged look and came encumbered with parents, stuck around from 1962 to 1966, before Barbie squashed her flat. In 1969, Ideal Toy created Crissy, whose hair grew with the push of a button; you can still find Crissy on eBay, but not in Toys R Us. Kenner's spookily big-headed Blythe, whose eye color could be changed from green to blue to pink to orange, lasted for one year: 1972. (She has since been rediscovered by hipster collectors; a photographer named Gina Garan poses her in myriad scenarios, as if she were a plastic Cindy Sherman.) In the mid-eighties, Hasbro launched Jem—corporate by day, rock and roll by night. Mattel moved swiftly to undercut her with its own Rock Star Barbie. And then there were the earnest attempts to make more "realistic" fashion dolls, an enterprise doomed to oxymoronic failure. The Happy to Be Me doll, which came out in the early nineties, when childhood anorexia was a bigger media trope than childhood obesity, had a thicker waist, wider hips, and larger feet than Barbie, and left little girls cold. As M. G. Lord, the author of "Forever Barbie" (1994), wrote, "She may have been happy to be herself, but it was obvious, even to kids, that she had extremely low standards." And the Get Real Girls—muscular, sporty dolls who were supposed to be snowboarders, soccer players, and the like—might have appealed to athletic girls, except that athletic girls preferred to play sports. "They can kick Barbie's butt like you wouldn't believe," a promotional Web site promised in 2000. On store shelves, though, Barbie kicked theirs.

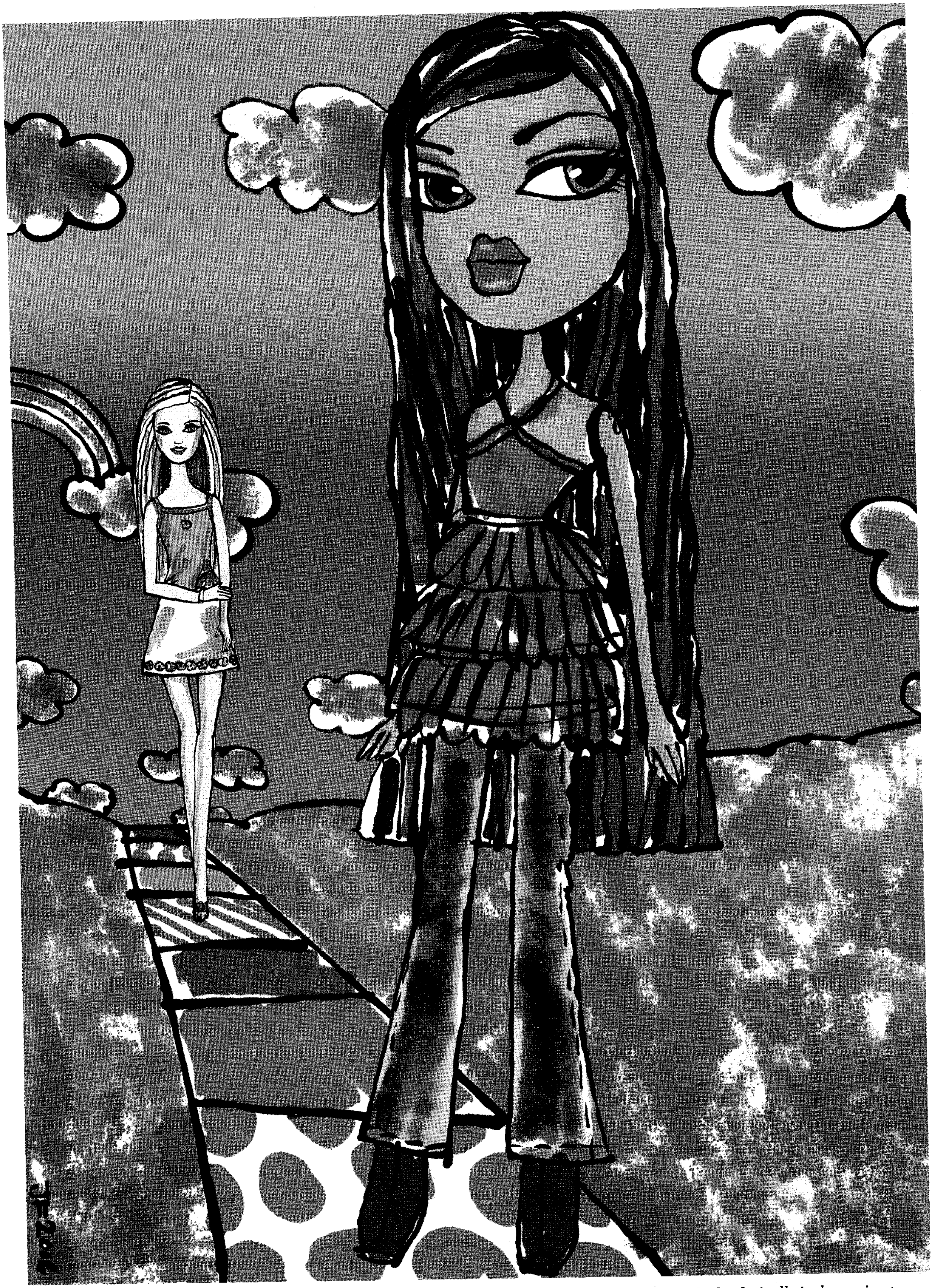
In June, 2001, M.G.A. Entertainment, a small toy company in Southern California, unveiled a line of dolls called Bratz. It was not an auspicious début. M.G.A. had enjoyed some success with handheld electronic toys imported from Japan—M.G.A. stands for Micro Games of America—and with a baby doll called Singing Bouncy Baby, but never with a fashion doll. The company was privately owned, and its headquarters were in a drab stretch of the San Fernando Valley, amid a jumble of taquerias and doughnut shops near the Van Nuys airport. Its C.E.O., Isaac Larian, an Iranian immigrant with a degree in civil engineering whose first company imported brass tchotchkes from South Korea, still made sales calls himself. When a doll designer and on-and-off-again Mattel employee named Carter Bryant brought Larian a drawing of a new doll he had in mind, Larian at first saw little to admire. "To be honest, to me it looked weird—it looked ugly," Larian told me. But Larian's attitude toward the tastes of children is respectful to the point of reverence, and his daughter Jasmin, then eleven years old, happened to be hanging out in his office that day. Larian asked her what she thought of the drawing. "And, you know, I saw this sparkle that you see in kids' eyes," he recalled. "They talk with their body language more than their voice. And she says, 'Yeah, it's cute.' " For Larian, that was enough: "I said, 'O.K., we'll do it.' "

At first, M.G.A. struggled to give Bryant's drawings three-dimensional form. The design showed a face in which the lips and eyes were cartoonishly prominent and the nose was vanishingly small: it was as if the doll had undergone successive rounds of plastic surgery. Molding that micronose in vinyl wasn't easy. At the Hong Kong toy fair in January, 2001, Larian and his team had only a rough sample to show venders; the hair was Scotch-taped on. And in October of that year Toys R Us cancelled its order for Bratz because initial sales were not what Larian had predicted. He borrowed money to fund more advertising; by Christmas, Bratz dolls had taken off.

In the five years since then, M.G.A. has sold a hundred and twenty-five million Bratz worldwide, and it has become the top fashion doll in the United Kingdom and Australia. Global sales of Bratz products reached two billion dollars in 2005; sales of Barbie remained higher, at three billion dollars, but they declined by 12.8 per cent. Last December, after five years in which domestic Barbie sales had either declined or stagnated for all but three quarters, Mattel replaced Matthew Bousquette, who had headed the Barbie line, with Neil Friedman and Chuck Scothon, who together had been running its successful Fisher-Price division. (Friedman, a president at Mattel, is known to be gifted at turning around flagging toy lines.) According to Sean McGowan, a toy-industry analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities, Bratz has now captured about forty per cent of the fashion-doll market, compared with Barbie's sixty per cent. Barbie is still an instantly recognizable brand name, like Kleenex or Coke, but even Scothon says, "The competition has changed. There's no denying that."

Bratz dolls have large heads and skinny bodies; their almond-shaped eyes are tilted upward at the edges and adorned with thick crescents of eyeshadow, and their lips are lush and pillowy, glossed to a candy-apple sheen and rimmed with dark lip liner. They look like pole dancers on their way to work at a gentlemen's club. Unlike Barbie, they can stand unassisted. I've heard mothers say that they would never buy

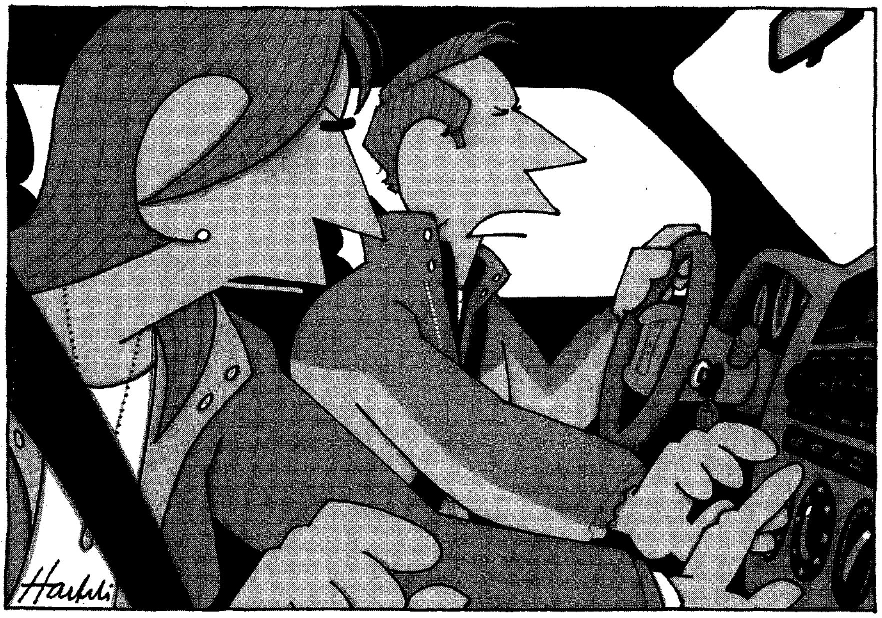
JEFFREY FULVIMARI



Bratz dolls don't have Barbie's pinup measurements—they're shorter and less busty—and they look ethnically indeterminate.

their daughters a doll that couldn't stand on its own, but perhaps they should have been more careful what they wished for. To change a Bratz doll's shoes, you have to snap off its feet at the ankles. (It's creepy but ingenious; because the footwear is attached to the legs, all those little shoes are harder to lose.) Their outsized feet are oddly insinuating: you can picture the Bratz dolls tottering around on their stalklike legs, like fauns waking up from a tranquillizer dart. Bratz dolls don't have Barbie's pinup-girl measurements—they're not as busty and they're shorter. But their outfits include halter tops, faux-fur armlets, and ankle-laced stiletto sandals, and they wear the sly, dozy expression of a party girl after one too many mojitos. They are the "girls with a passion for fashion," as the slogan has it, so their adventures—as presented in all those "sold separately" books and other paraphernalia—run to all-night mall parties and trips to Vegas. ("Deck out and step out for a party in the streets, as you spend the weekend with the girls in the city that never sleeps.") A Bratz Princess—one of the newer versions—wears a tiara and, instead of a ball gown, a tight camouflage T-shirt and a short skirt. You could never imagine a Bratz doll assuming any of the dozens of careers Barbie has pursued over the decades: not Business Executive or Surgeon or Summit Diplomat—not even Pan Am Flight Attendant or Pet Doctor. Bratz girls seem more like kept girls, or girls trying to convert a stint on reality TV into a future as the new Ashlee or Lindsay or Paris. Whereas Mattel's Scothon likes to talk about Barbie's "aspirational" qualities—how she might inspire "a girl to run for President and look good while she was doing it"—Larian prefers to talk about "fashion and fantasy" and what's "cute."

The Bratz girls also tend to look ethnic, or, rather, ethnically indeterminate: blond dolls are in the minority in the Bratz world, as they increasingly are in the world of Bratz consumers. At the Toy Fair, the industry's giant annual trade show in New York, Larian told me, "When we came out with these dolls, one of the things we did not want to do was just label them. Don't call them African-American. Don't call them Hispanic. Don't call them Middle Eastern. Don't call them white. Just convey difference." Larian is fifty-two years old, and he has graying, closely cropped curls and shrewd, dark eyes; he was wearing a nicely cut gray suit and an understated tie. Nearby, a group of toy retailers from around the country, most of them middle-aged white men, milled around a magenta-and-purple showroom, solemnly handling Bratz dolls and their diminutive accessories. (No one under eighteen is allowed into the Toy Fair.) Southern California, where Larian immigrated on his own, at the age of seventeen, was an inspiration for Bratz, he said, because it is a place where racial mixing is commonplace. Larian and his team picked names for the Bratz dolls that didn't align them with any one ethnic group—made-up-sounding names (Nevra, Kiana) or names with offbeat spellings (Meygan, Roxxi) or "exotic" names with crossover appeal (Jade, Yasmin). "I was in Brazil," Larian recalled. "I asked some girls, 'Where do you think Yasmin is from?' and they said, 'Oh, she's Brazilian, she's Latin.' Then I was in Israel, and I asked, 'Where do you think Yasmin is from?' and they thought she was Middle Eastern. It's fascinating to see that, everywhere you go." When Mattel came out with the first black Barbie, in 1968, it seemed like a well-meaning afterthought. Bratz girls were born as a multiracial pack; each one is a slightly different shade. That is enough to earn them the approval of Naomi Wolf, the feminist writer. "If I were betting on culture as a form of stocks, I would get out of skinny Barbie and into multiethnic, imaginative Bratz dolls," she wrote recently.



"Let me do it. You don't understand the science of defrosting."

What Bratz dolls are both contributing to and feeding on is a culture in which girls play at being "sassy"—the toy industry's favored euphemism for sexy—and discard traditional toys at a younger age. (Girls seem to be growing out of toys earlier than boys are, industry analysts say.) Toy marketers now invoke a phenomenon called K.G.O.Y.—Kids Getting Older Younger—and talk about it as though it were a fact of modern life over which they have no control, rather than one which they have largely created. Mattel's Scothon said, "Kids are certainly exposed to more things at earlier ages. Their scope of reference is wider. Their exposure to media is greater." Larian told me, "Little girls are really much more sophisticated now than they used to be."

Barbie was originally intended for nine- to twelve-year-olds; today, girls widely perceive it as a toy for three- to six-year-olds. The association of Barbie with preschool girls sometimes leads slightly older girls to repudiate the doll with sadistic élan. Agnes Nairn and Patricia Gaya Wicks, professors of business at the University of Bath, and Christine Griffin, their colleague in the psychology department, published a study earlier this year revealing that seven-to-eleven-year-old girls enjoyed destroying Barbies. As one subject put it, "I just kept having to squish their heads off." Sometimes, the interviewers seemed taken aback by the girls' ingenuity in punishing their Barbies:

First Girl: Our friend does that with Barbies.

Second Girl: Yeah, she microwaves them.

Interviewer: She microwaves them? Oh, gosh.

First Girl: Did she parachute one out of the house?

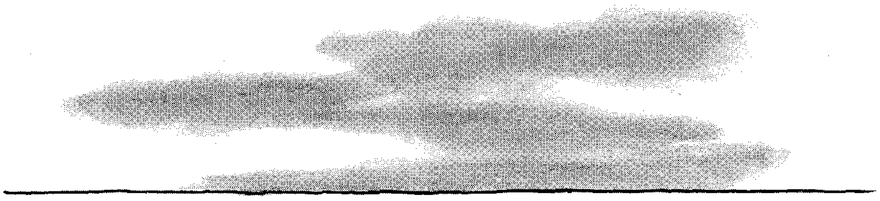
Second Girl: Yeah, she parachuted one out of the house and it landed in the next-door neighbour's garden.

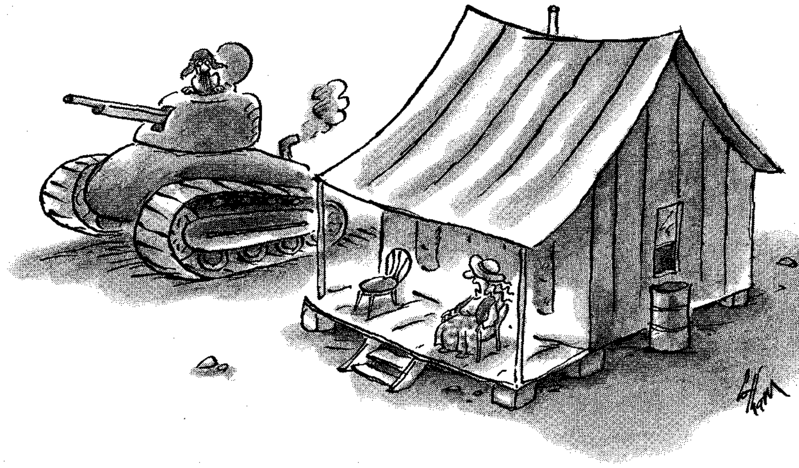
The study concluded that girls turned on Barbie because she seemed out of fashion and disposable (children had so many of them, in so many different guises, that they were "simply being imaginative" in getting rid "of an excessive commodity in the same way as one might crush cans for recycling"), but most of all because she was "babyish," and the girls "saw her as representing their younger childhood out of which they felt they had now grown."

You used to hear the opposite theory: when girls rejected Barbie it was because she represented a sexualized womanhood they felt ambivalent about entering. But Larian, for one, thinks that Barbie now represents a "mommy figure" for many girls, and they don't particularly want to play with a doll who reminds them of their mothers. In any case, there are some toys that kids love until they hate, and some they do not. Sean McGowan, the toy-industry analyst, said, "Nobody gets to a certain age and says, 'I hate Mickey Mouse.' But Barbie is now like Barney. Three-year-olds are addicted to it like crack, but all it takes is for one kid to be embarrassed and they turn on it."

For M.G.A., holding on to the six-to-twelve-year-old market—a group that, until the eighties, wasn't yet letting go of childish things—means making dolls that look like celebrity hotties. As Larian wrote in *Brand Strategy* earlier this year, "Bratz are not merely dolls but 'fashion icons' that look to the runways and what kids wear in and out of school for inspiration." With Bratz, the company is selling the notion that divahood is something for girls to aspire to, with or without a talent to go with it. This is the attitude that fuels, for example, the success of Club Libby Lu, the chain of mall stores where six-year-olds can get makeovers for their birthdays, complete with hair extensions and lip gloss; it's also the attitude behind T-shirts for little girls bearing slogans such as "So Many Boys, So Little Time" and "My ♥ Belongs to Shopping." Many parents find this aesthetic weird, even repellent, but somehow hard to dodge.

Indeed, marketers counsel companies not to feel guilty about "going around moms," as the 2004 book "The Great Tween Buying Machine" puts it, and advertising products that parents dislike. The book's co-authors, David L. Siegel, Timothy J. Coffey, and Gregory Livingston, who run the marketing agency WonderGroup, write that, thanks to the "nag factor," there are "plenty of examples of successful products that moms really don't like for themselves, but they buy anyway." They cite unusual color innovations like green Heinz ketchup and blue Hawaiian Punch: "Moms do not like any one of these products, yet each has generated millions of dollars in sales." Calling "Mom-centricity" a "heinous disease," they remind marketers that all they have to do is "appease" parents, not please them. With Bratz, a parent might think, Sure, they're sexy-looking, but at least a ten-year-old girl playing with them is a ten-year-old still playing with dolls. Fara Warner, the author of "Power of the Purse: How Smart Businesses Are Adapting to the World's Most Important Consumers—Women," goes further, writing that Bratz represent "a future where young girls don't need their dolls to show them the career choices they have open to them. They already know they can choose any career and pursue it. It's a future where the rules about the size and shape of women's bodies, and how women express their sexuality, are far broader and more open." Whether a seven-year-old actually needs a doll that hints at how broad the rules of sexuality now are is not a question Warner addresses. This line of thinking gets even trickier when it comes to M.G.A.'s Bratz Babyz: baby dolls with makeup, lacy lingerie, and bikinis, and bottles slung on chains around their necks. ("Step back in time with the Bratz and see how it all began, as they





"I was hoping you had no more territorial ambitions."

• •

xpress themselves with lots of style, and Baby 'Brattitude!' ") Parents buy Bratz Babyz for girls as young as two. A ten-year-old might see irony—or humor—in the outrageous shoes, collagen-plump lips, and attitude-laden pout of a Bratz doll; irony is generally lost on toddlers.

A few weeks ago, a couple named Christopher and Tiffany Himes were in the doll section of a Toys R Us in Rockville, Maryland, having a half-joking argument about Bratz dolls. Tiffany, who is twenty-seven, is a stay-at-home mother of three daughters: Emma, seven; Madison, six; and Olivia, three. She said, "Unfortunately, the girls are really into them. I say 'unfortunately' because Bratz are just really trashy. My husband can't stand them."

"Oh, yeah," Chris, a thirty-two-year-old comedy writer, said. "I have some strong opinions on Bratz." He strode over to one of the Bratz shelves and peered at a box that contained something called the Wicked Twiins. Ciara was the "spunky" twin (" 'cuz I'm always causing trouble"); Diona was the "sparkly" twin (" 'cuz I'm in love with my own reflection"). Both Wicked Twiins were wearing black chokers, tight black T-shirts that said "Bad Girl," low-slung skirts (one chartreuse, one hot pink), and lace-up, high-heeled boots; one had bare legs, the other wore black fishnet stockings. "I mean, these are dolls that look like streetwalkers," Chris said. "Or, you know these underground 'pumping parties' you hear about, where people go for plastic surgery on the cheap? Well, they look like pumping-party victims." Tiffany and Chris had considered not letting the girls have Bratz—the first doll had come into their home as a gift—but Tiffany felt that banning toys was likely to backfire. Madison, the six-year-old, "was just really into fashion," Tiffany said, which was why she liked Bratz, and little Olivia liked them because her older sister did. Tiffany said she had noticed that the Bratz dolls did not elicit the kind of imaginative role-playing she had engaged in with Barbie as a child but, rather, focussed her girls' minds entirely on taking the dolls' clothes off and putting them back on.

Chris pushed a button on a talking Bratz doll named Jade, which was dressed in a rhinestone-studded micromini, a tank top emblazoned with a biker tattoo, and a cropped fur-trimmed black vinyl jacket. "Do you ever get fashion ideas from celebrities?" Jade asked, and then confided, "Sometimes I get ideas from celeb photos in magazines." She added, rather unconvincingly, "Being smart is cool." Chris snorted, and Tiffany said, "Bratz will fizzle out. Barbie will stay. She might have to get sexier, but she'll stay."

In 2002, Mattel introduced a new line of dolls: My Scene Barbie, which kept Barbie's basic dimensions but had bigger eyes, plumper, shinier lips, and hotter clothes. A recent incarnation of the line is the unsubtly named My Bling Bling Barbie. (The Barbie Web site says of one of these dolls, "Chelsea burns up the Bling Bling scene, in an ultra hot halter top and sassy skirt *sooo* scorchin'.") When not "getting their groove on," the Bling Bling girls are "mall maniacs." An animated video on the Barbie Web site depicts them struggling to lay off shopping for a day. They manage only a brief visit to the park—where the puppies they coo over turn into high-heeled boots, the fountain spouts jewelry, and the clouds above them spell out "SALE"—before they give in and head to the mall.

The competition between Bratz and Barbie has grown increasingly nasty. In April, 2004, Mattel sued the doll designer Carter Bryant, accusing him of developing his designs for Bratz while working at Mattel and taking them to M.G.A., thereby breaching his contract.

RESEMBLANCE

It was my father in that restaurant
On Central Avenue in Orange, New Jersey,
Where I stopped for lunch and a drink, after coming away
From visiting, after many years had passed,
The place to which I'd brought my father's ashes
And the ashes of my mother, and where my father's
Grandparents, parents, brothers had been buried,
And others of the family, all together.

The atmosphere was smoky, and there was a vague
Struggling transaction going on between
The bright day light of the busy street outside
And the somewhat dirty light of the unwashed
Ceiling globes of the restaurant I was in.
He was having lunch. I couldn't see what he was having
But he seemed to be eating, maybe without
Noticing whatever it was he may have been eating;
He seemed to be listening to a conversation
With two or three others—Shades of the Dead come back
From where they went to when they went away?
Or maybe those others weren't speaking at all? Maybe
It was a dumbshow? Put on for my benefit?

It was the eerie persistence of his not
Seeming to recognize that I was there,
Watching him from my table across the room;
It was also the sense of his being included
In the conversation around him, and yet not,
Though this in life had been familiar to me,
No great change from what had been there before,
Even in my sense that I, across the room,
Was excluded, which went along with my sense of him
When he was alive, that often he didn't feel
Included in the scenes and talk around him,
And his isolation itself excluded others.

Where were we, in that restaurant that day?
Had I gone down into the world of the dead?
Were those other people really Shades of the Dead?
We expect that, if they came back, they would come back
To impart some knowledge of what it was they had learned.
Or if this was indeed Down There, then they,
Down there, would reveal, to us who visit them,
In a purified language some truth that in our condition
Of being alive we are unable to know.

Their tongues are ashes when they'd speak to us.

Unable to know is a condition I've lived in
All my life; it is a poverty
Of imagination about the life of another.
This is, I think, the case with everyone.
Is it because there is a silence that we
Are all of us *forbidden* to cross, not only
The silence that divides the dead from the living
But, antecedent to that, is it the silence
There is between the living and the living,
Unable to reach across that silence through
The baffling light there always is between us?
Among the living the body can do so sometimes,
But the mind, constricted, inhibited by its ancestral
Knowledge of final separation, holds back,
Unable to complete what it wanted to say.

What is your name that I can call you by?

Virgil said, when Eurydice died again,
"There was still so much to say" that had not been said
Even before her first death, from which he had vainly
Attempted, with his singing, to rescue her.

—*David Ferry*

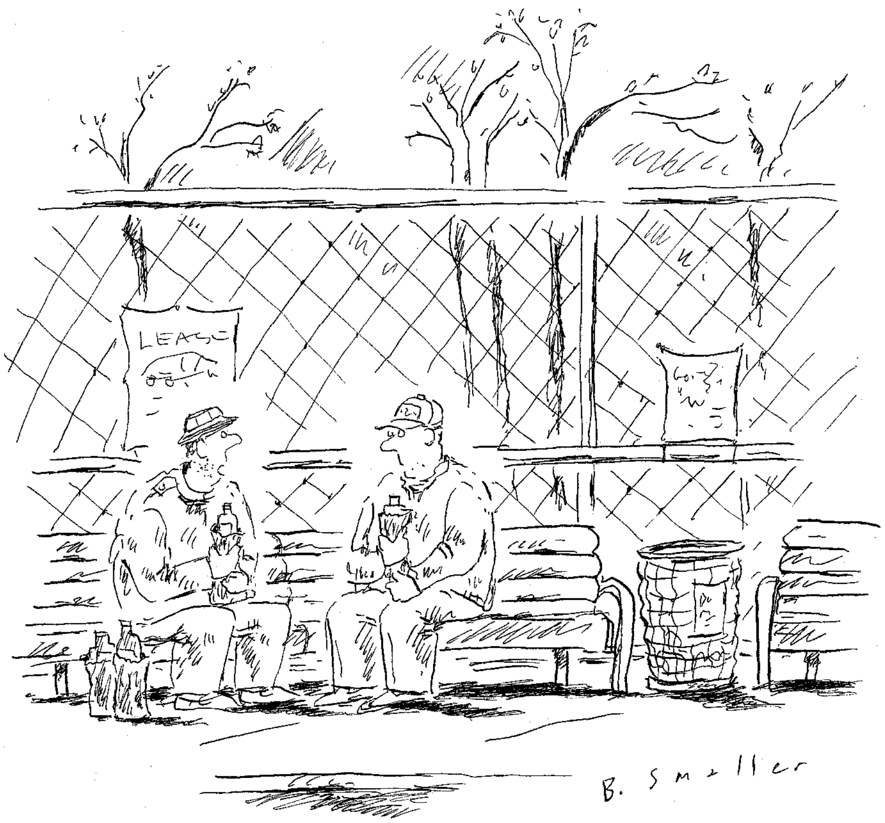
Bryant, who claims that he was not working for Mattel when he envisioned Bratz, countersued, alleging that Mattel required him to sign an overly broad and unlawful confidentiality agreement, which he claims kept him from divulging even the names of its employees. And in April, 2005, M.G.A. sued Mattel, accusing the company of trying to "muscle M.G.A. out of the business" while engaging in "serial copycatting" of M.G.A.'s products. The complaint makes much of the allegedly proprietary look of the Bratz eye, and the ways in which, it claims, the My Scene eye has evolved to mimic it:

> The "My Scene" eye [originally had] lashes that radiate almost straight out, circumferentially, from the eyelids and, although the eye is more almond shaped than a "Barbie" eye, the eye is not so sleepy and heavy lidded as a "Bratz" eye and is only lightly shadowed. The new "My Scene" eye, in contrast, is dramatically more similar to a "Bratz" eye. . . . The doe-eyed innocent look of the "My Scene" eye [has been] replaced with a sultrier look, characteristic of "Bratz." The new "My Scene" eye . . . boasts lashes that sweep out and away from the outer corner of the eye, just like the "Bratz" eye. The new "My Scene" eye is also more heavily lidded and thickly lined, and the make-up is more markedly pronounced and dramatic.

Barbie, chided the M.G.A. lawyers, "does not 'play nice' with others (particularly her competitors), and needs to be taught to 'share' (at least in the fashion doll marketplace)." The suit also alleges that Mattel has unfairly tried to lock up the market on Saran doll hair—the long tresses that crown the vinyl heads of both Barbie and Bratz dolls and that girls love to comb—by "buying up the supply from the two main hair supply companies."

Mattel will not comment on the lawsuits, because they are still pending in California district court—and may be for years. (It has filed court papers denying M.G.A.'s accusations.) On November 20th, Mattel amended its lawsuit against Bryant to include both M.G.A. and Isaac Larian as defendants. The new complaint alleges that "M.G.A. intentionally stole not just specific Mattel property, such as Bratz designs, prototypes and related materials, but also a vast array of trade secrets and other confidential information that comprise Mattel's intellectual infrastructure." Larian said in response, "This lawsuit just proves that Mattel is desperate. They are living in a fantasyland. They wish they owned Bratz but they know that they don't. We will continue to beat them in the marketplace in the old-fashioned American way, through better product innovation, better sales, and better marketing." When I spoke with Scothon, he avoided referring to M.G.A. or Bratz by name. He said, "The competition has done an awful lot of following. Barbie will be around for another forty-seven years. The same can't be said for the competition."

When I visited Larian at the Bratz headquarters in Van Nuys, he was full of righteous scoffing about Mattel. After Mattel reintroduced the Ken doll, in February—Ken had endured a two-year exile from store shelves after the company announced that Barbie had dumped him—Larian had told reporters that it was "stupid publicity" and that "Ken is not going to save Barbie." (And indeed the whole Ken-is-back theme seemed so tongue-in-cheek—the campy Hollywood stylist Phillip Bloch effused on CNN about the new metrosexual look he'd developed for him—that it was hard to imagine his having much appeal for little girls.) During our interview, Larian dispatched an assistant to gather up a pile of My Scene dolls that he had on his desk; she dumped them on the table where we were eating lunch, so that I could study them. "My Scene was a knockoff," he declared. "They don't even look like Barbie! They look like Bratz!" Take the dolls home and show



"I wanted wine and women and song, but I've learned to settle."

them to your six-year-old, he urged me more than once; see if she agrees that they look alike. Part of M.G.A.'s suit depends on its ability to prove that customers have been confused about which product is which. But in practice few Bratz- or Barbie-loving girls seem to have any trouble telling the difference.

Barbie occupies a unique place in the history of American toys. Before she was launched, in 1959, most of the dolls that children played with were baby dolls or sturdy-legged little-girl dolls. In 1987, the staff of the Strong Museum, a toy museum in Rochester, New York, interviewed ninety-eight women about their early-twentieth-century childhoods—specifically, how they had played. The recollections were often about climbing trees, jumping in haystacks, skating, and sledding; one woman remembered splashing in a stream and "getting bloodsuckers all over my legs." Many of the girls played with dolls into their teen-age years. They lavished baby dolls with maternal care—diapering and feeding them as they'd seen their mothers do with younger siblings. The Dy-Dee Doll, invented by a Brooklyn schoolteacher named Marie Wittam, in the early thirties, even wet herself: you pushed a button on her stomach and water came out of a tube. The popular Betsy Wetsy, which was introduced soon afterward, performed the same dubious trick. The little-girl dolls—such as Patsy, whose manufacturer, Effanbee, touted her as a "lovable imp" with tiltable head and moveable limbs—were more like cheery companions to have tea with, read to, or take on special romps. "The dolls that looked like infants I would mother," recalled one woman. "The dolls that looked like they could be miniatures of me were my friends." Another woman recalled that she had played with her baby dolls until she was nine, when she acquired a baby brother.

Barbie was different—she was meant to be a young adult, a gal about town, possessor of a glamorous wardrobe and an imposing pair of breasts. Barbie was invented by Ruth Handler, the tenth child of a Polish Jewish immigrant family in Denver, Colorado. Her father, Jacob Mosko, was an entrepreneur who started a successful business making custom truck bodies. As a young woman, Ruth Mosko moved to Southern California, where she worked as a stenographer at Paramount Pictures and married Elliot Handler; in 1945, the couple, along with Harold Mattson, founded Mattel. It became the most successful toy company in the world.

One of Handler's inspirations for the Barbie doll was a postwar cartoon character who had originally been featured in the German newspaper *Bild.* Lilli, as she was called, was a tough little blonde with an eye for the main chance; eventually, she had been turned into a lewd three-dimensional novelty item intended for purchase by men. Handler saw possibilities in Lilli, though she had to look past some of her trappings, as she recalled in her 1994 autobiography, "Dream Doll." Lilli's face was "too hard-looking," but her body was "another story":

> Here were the breasts, the small waist, the long tapered legs I had enthusiastically described for the designers all those years ago.
>
> The idea had been the result of the many times I had observed my daughter Barbara playing with paperdolls with her friends. While the toy counters in the early 1950s were heavy with paperdolls of every size, shape, and form, Barbara and her friends always insisted on buying only *adult* female paperdolls. They simply were not interested in baby paperdolls or even those representing ten-year-olds, their own age. Pretending to be doing something else, I'd listen, fascinated, to the girls as they played with these paperdolls hour after hour. And I discovered something very important: They were using these dolls to project their dreams of their own futures as adult women. . . . It dawned on me that this was a basic, much needed play pattern that had never before been offered by the doll industry to little girls. Oh, sure, there were so-called fashion dolls, those who came with more than one outfit. But these dolls had flat chests, big bellies, and squatty legs—they were built like overweight six- or eight-year-olds. The idea of putting a prom dress on such a doll, had such a dress even been available, was ludicrous.

Handler worried that "little girls would be intimidated by too much beauty" in a doll, but, unlike some of Barbie's future critics, she decided that the girls could handle it, and, after the first models, she made the dolls still prettier. Initially, Mattel produced brunet and red-headed Barbies, but the blondes were the runaway best-sellers.

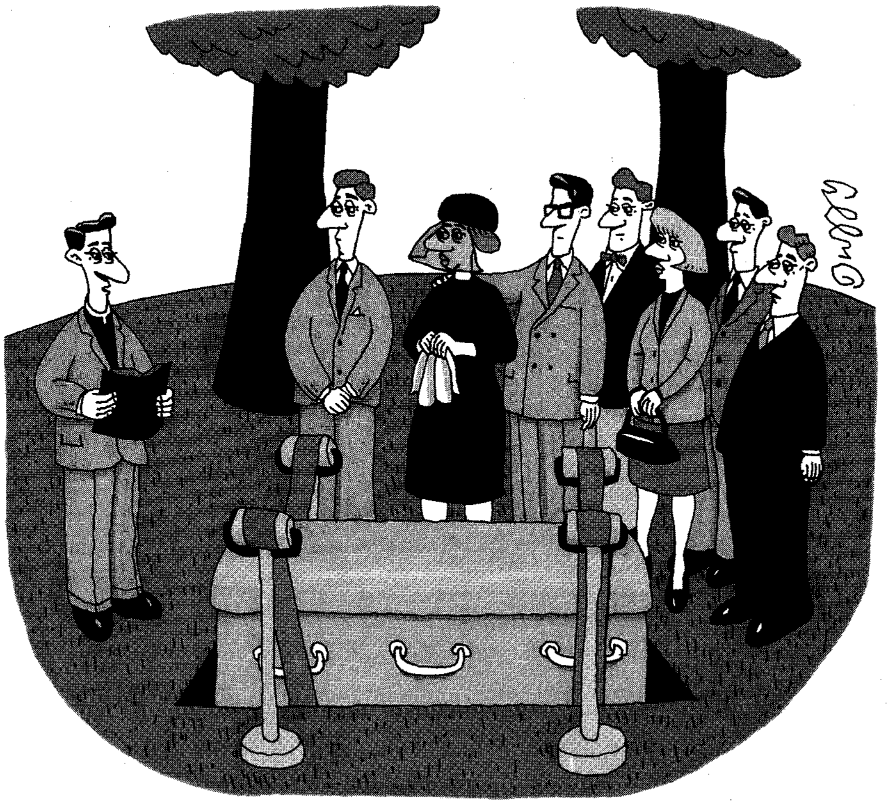
In 1958, a year before Barbie's début, Mattel commissioned a study of toys by Ernest Dichter, one of the marketing gurus anatomized in Vance Packard's "The Hidden Persuaders" (1957). A Jewish émigré from Vienna who had trained as a psychoanalyst, Dichter reinvented himself with vulpine glee in the United States, offering his services to American brands such as Ivory soap and Chrysler. Like some sitcom parody of a Freudian, he tirelessly dug up sexual explanations for consumers' reactions to products. (Thus, the Edsel failed because its designer had "castrated" it by putting an artful hole between the front fenders; it was a challenge to market hot dogs to women, because, as one man whom Dichter interviewed said, "My wife gets mad at me when I munch or suck contentedly on my frankfurter.") Dichter's work for Mattel, which is discussed in detail in Lord's excellent "Forever Barbie," was a prescient example of conducting focus groups with a psychological edge. Dichter detected a notable and exploitable wedge between mothers and daughters when it came to Barbie. Many girls loved her; many mothers did not—and the disapproval they expressed sounded a lot like the disapproval you hear mothers expressing about Bratz today. Either the complaints that children are becoming too knowing too early are to some extent perennial, or companies keep pushing the bounds of what parents find acceptable, and parents are limited in what they can do to push back. (Both explanations probably have some truth.)

One mother told Dichter, "I know little girls want dolls with high heels but I object to that sexy costume. I wouldn't walk around the house like that. I don't like that influence on my little girl. If only they would let children remain young a little longer. . . . It's hard enough to raise a lady these days without undue moral pressure." Another admitted that her daughter would be "fascinated" by Barbie, but said she wouldn't buy the doll for her: "It has too much of a figure. . . . I'm sure she would like to have one, but I wouldn't buy it. All these kids talk about is how the teachers jiggle."

As Lord reports, Dichter believed that mothers could be bought off. One mother who initially found the doll too racy changed her mind when she heard her daughter say how "well groomed" Barbie was. Could Barbie make tidy little hair-combers out of grubby tomboys? If so, then maybe those pontoon breasts could be overlooked. Dichter concluded, "The type of arguments which can be used successfully to overcome parental objection are in the area of the doll's function in awakening in the child a concern with proper appearance." At the same time, a doll with a "sophisticated, even wicked" wardrobe would satisfy a girl's urge to rebel against her mother.

There were always mothers who refused to allow Barbie in the house. (Anna Quindlen once wrote of her desire to drive a "silver lamé stake" through Barbie's "plastic heart.") And there were always girls who didn't particularly care for dolls. In the past, they probably called themselves tomboys; now they're more likely to refer to themselves as what they are not—they aren't girly-girls. Annie, a smart, dog-loving ten-year-old I know, says she's just "not a doll person" and dismisses Barbie as "so twentieth century." Other dolls invite a different fantasy than Barbie does, and tend to unite mothers and daughters more. Groovy Girls, made by Manhattan Toy, are soft dolls that wear trendy but not revealing clothes, smile rather than pout, look to be tweens themselves, and seem to fulfill the old doll-as-pal role. But Groovy Girls don't command anywhere near the shelf space at major retailers that Barbie and Bratz do.

American Girl, the line of dolls from different historical eras, has positioned itself as a brand that helps girls hold on to little-girlhood for a bit longer. The dolls are meant to be nine-year-olds; they come with books that offer historically correct, if bland, details of life in the American past and tell slightly anachronistic tales of feminine pluck. (Felicity, from the eighteenth century, dons boys' clothes to ride a horse she isn't supposed to; Whartonian-rich-girl Samantha democratically befriends the Irish maid next door.) The American Girl Place stores in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles offer themselves as approachably elegant, slightly retro sites for mother-daughter bonding; at in-store cafés, shiny-haired girls in party dresses and mothers with just-freshened lipstick and switched-off cell phones chat over tea sandwiches and chocolate mousse. (The restaurants even place a box full of conversation-starting questions on each table: If you were a character from a book, who would you be? Would you rather have the power of flying or be-



"There's something about an Aqua Velva man."

coming invisible?) Last year, American Girl launched a campaign to "Save Girlhood." Its Web site bore the message: "Save unicorns. Save dreams. Save rainbows. Save girlhood." It went on, "The way we see it, girls are growing up too fast. From every angle, today's girls are bombarded by influences pushing them towards womanhood at too early an age—at the expense of their innocence, their playfulness, their imagination." Even some girls see American Girl dolls as an antidote to the K.G.O.Y. poison. "They look like regular girls—they don't have all that makeup on like Barbie or Bratz" is how Annie puts it. But the dolls are expensive—nearly a hundred dollars for a starter kit of doll and book—and sold only by catalogue, on their Web site, or at American Girl Place. American Girl, whose parent company has been owned since 1998 by Mattel, will never be a mass consumer brand, like Bratz or Barbie dolls, which cost less than thirty dollars on average. (Based on M.G.A. figures, Bratz products outsold American Girl last year by a rate of five to one.)

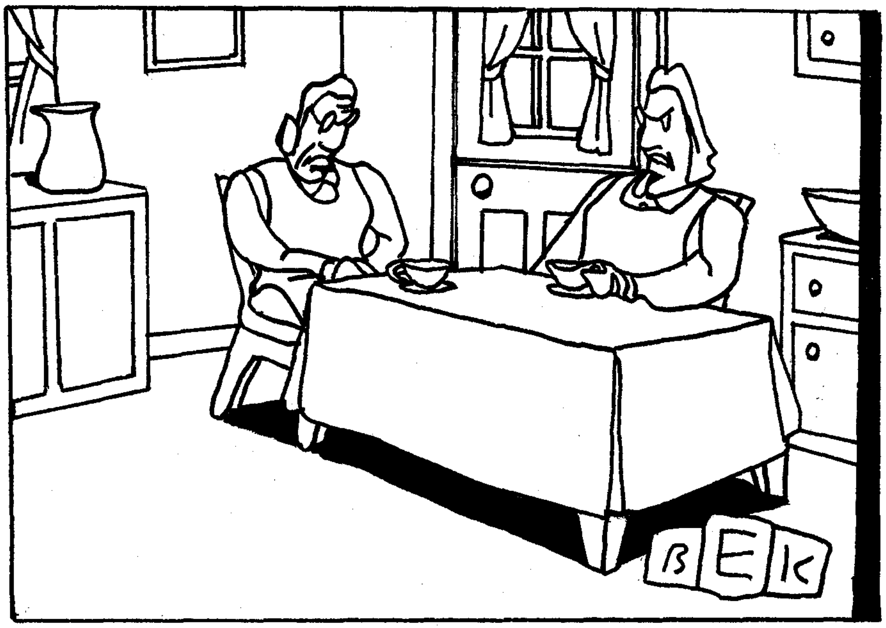
American Girl dolls—expensive, innocent-looking, and old-fashioned—are on one side of a class and cultural divide. Judging from the families you see shopping at American Girl Place, the dolls appeal disproportionately to well-off white parents willing to spend whatever it takes to help prolong their daughters' childhood. Bratz and My Scene Barbies, by contrast, are peddling the toy world's version of gangsta chic. Fara Warner notes that Bratz dolls mimic the fashions that their very young owners regularly see "on cable channels such as MTV and BET." And Sean McGowan, even more candidly, says that Bratz have the same allure that "makes rap popular with white kids in the suburbs."

Isaac Larian may hate Mattel, but he admires Ruth Handler, whom he calls a "true entrepreneur." Larian grew up in Tehran, where his father owned a textile shop, and he helped out from the time he was eleven. When he was seventeen, he told his parents he wanted to go to the United States. They sent him to Los Angeles "with seven hundred and fifty dollars—a lot of money for them." In his first job, he washed dishes from eleven at night to seven in the morning at a coffee shop in the predominantly Hispanic city of Lawndale. Later, he waited tables and put himself through school at California State University, Los Angeles, where he got a degree in civil engineering. Entrepreneurship is what appealed to him, though. After graduating, he began importing cheap brass doodads from South Korea, starting a company called Surprise Gift Wagon. In the late eighties, he persuaded Nintendo to give him the American rights to their handheld games. "The first year, we sold twenty-two million dollars in games, and we had a thirty-five-per-cent profit," he recalled. "But the next year we had ten million dollars' worth of Nintendo games that nobody wanted anymore. The kids wanted something new." He concluded from that experience that a company marketing to kids has to keep an avid eye on trends. "With Bratz, we need to change them every three, four months," he explained. "What you see in the stores today was not in the stores last year. And when we come out with our fall line, what's in the stores in the spring is not going to be there. And the key is to be fresh, to listen to the kids carefully, because they change literally every week. And you have to think, What are they into *now*, and come up with products that let them be ahead of the curve. If we stop doing that, the same thing that happened to Barbie is going to happen to us. They're gonna throw us in the trash can."

Larian likes to tell a story about the first Bratz doll, which wore pants with fashionable embroidery trim at the cuffs. When M.G.A. released the doll for the international market, Larian decided that the trim was too expensive and it was left off the pants. He thought nobody would notice. But, he recalled, "You wouldn't *believe* how many letters we got from kids in the U.K. saying, 'I was in New York, and the Cloe doll or the Yasmin doll that I saw in America had this little embroidery on the pants and the one I bought in London didn't have that.' " Kids, he learned from that experience, notice visual details at a level of precision that surprises adults. And kids' opinions about toys, Larian believes, are always right. "I have insomnia—people in my company think I never sleep," Larian said, smiling but not joking. "I take home all these fan letters, and I read them at night. Our designers—it's mandatory for them to read those letters carefully, too. We pay attention—we make toys kids want. The secret formula is to listen carefully to kids. They tell you. If they don't like something, they say, 'This sucks.' If they like it, they tell you. And if they want you to make it better they tell you."

One recent afternoon, I sat in a darkened room behind a one-way mirror with Larian and Rachel Griffin, of the M.G.A. publicity team, as they watched a focus group for a new product line: the Bratz Genie Magic dolls. The four little girls gathered inside—Ember, Emily, Kristine, and Morgan—were between the ages of eight and ten. They all had sneakers on, and their sweatpants and windbreakers bore the marks of the back yard or the classroom: grass-stained knees, a dusting of chalk. They sat on bright-colored beanbag chairs, looking alert and easily amused, happy to have got out of school a little early. The interviewer was a beautiful young woman with spike-heeled boots, extravagant black curls, and a humorless mien. She started by asking why the girls liked Bratz. Kristine, who was ten, cited the difficulty of losing their shoes. Ember, who was nine, called out, "They're just so fashionable!" And Morgan, who was eight and had long straight dark hair, remarked that Barbies "all look the same. They're all blond." Larian, who sat next to me, murmured contentedly, "Good girl. Kids are so smart." In fact, Barbies now come in a number of hair and skin colors, but for Morgan an annoying aura of blondness still clung to the Mattel doll.

Kristine was the expert, the one who had seen "Bratz," the tie-in television show, and who appreciated specific qualities about the dolls' hair and shoes. Emily and Ember were more reticent. Morgan had a goofy, anarchic way about her. Maybe it was because she was younger—"Dang, why am I so young?" she asked cheerily, of no one in particular—but she seemed to see



"He was gingerbread and he ran away—it's time to move on."

something faintly ridiculous in the self-serious world of fashionistas. Still, she, like the other girls, had a disconcerting tendency to spout ad-style triads of adjectives when asked what she'd tell others about Bratz products. "How would you describe these to your mom?" the interviewer asked, gesturing to the Genie Magic dolls and accessories. "Cool. Fun. Playful," Morgan recited. "Awesome. New. Fantastic," Kristine added.

After a while, the interviewer left the room, having invited the girls to play with the Genie Magic dolls and some of their accessories, including a flying carpet and a bottle from which the genie was supposed to emerge. The girls didn't know one another, but they slipped into companionability easily enough. A couple of them made the magic carpet fly around the room. There was some desultory talk about which of the Bratz Genies had a boyfriend, and there were invitations to tea—amazingly, tea remains a central trope of doll play, no matter how incongruous. (It's hard to imagine Jade, say, being excited by her grandmother's quilted tea cozies.)

Kristine, who wore her dark curly hair in a ponytail, spent a lot of time combing the long straight hair of the big-headed Bratz Genie doll. "I've combed her hair, and it's finally pretty," she said after a while. "I love combing hair."

To which Morgan replied, "I know, but it's so boring."

"It's actually fun," Kristine insisted.

The girls seemed to regard the word "sassy" as code for something more exciting and scandalous. By the time the interviewer came back into the room, Morgan was bouncing around, knocking over packages and singing, "I'm sassy! I'm *sassy!* Yeah!" and the girls were cracking up.

"O.K., guys," the interviewer said primly. "I need you to focus for a couple more minutes."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the one-way mirror, there were signs of distress. Larian was hanging on these little girls' every word. Again and again, he fired off messages on his BlackBerry based on their more or less idle chatter. The girls were the unwitting lords of this realm, although their power was of a limited sort—the answers children's marketers listen to so keenly are only to questions they have designed in pursuit of parents' money. Nevertheless, in the moment, the keenness of the listening and the watching made Ember and Morgan and Kristine and Emily seem influential indeed. For instance, the girls had been blithely referring to a Bratz Genie's bottle as her "house" or her "castle," causing Larian to groan and type agitatedly into his BlackBerry. "Jesus Christ, we've got to fix that," he said. The packaging and advertising campaign clearly called it a bottle.

The interviewer asked the girls, "What are you calling this over here?"

"The royal castle!" the girls cried out at once.

"If we call it a bottle, is that wrong?"

Yes, they said. They liked the "genie's castle" or the "genie's royal house." Later, the interviewer asked about their preferences between genies and princesses. Bratz was putting a lot of resources behind the Genies this season. "Princesses!" the girls chorused.

"Most girls really want to be princesses," Kristine explained. "Like Queen Elizabeth—girls at my school, they want to be like Queen Elizabeth's daughter." (Somehow, I don't think she meant Princess Anne.) "When we were smaller, we used to play princess in the castle. A princess—you *really* want to be one. You're really rich and stuff."

Morgan chimed in: "Genies are really unexpected, but princesses are something you really like." And she added, with daffy precision, "Girls will choose princesses because they'd rather be one—technically, of all the girls in the world, let's say five to one."

"Oh, my God," Larian moaned.

Other problems were discovered. The girls didn't realize that a design on the Bratz Princess box was supposed to be a picture frame; one of the girls thought it was coiled hair. Larian tried to take comfort in the fact that the girls recognized the handle on the box as a tiara that they could wear themselves. Still, he grumbled, "That frame costs a dollar-fifteen more a unit." Larian typed into his BlackBerry. "People from product development should be here," he said crossly.

Within a few weeks, M.G.A. had changed the labelling on the Genie Bottle—it was now a Genie Magic Royal Castle. By the end of the summer, the Genie Magic line had taken off, selling more than a million dolls. M.G.A. soon expanded, by acquiring the Little Tikes toy company, and began planning a move to bigger headquarters in the San Fernando Valley. Morgan, Kristine, Ember, and Emily had spoken. ♦

FICTION

A RIVER IN EGYPT

BY DAVID MEANS

The hot air in the sweat chamber—as the nurse had called it, ushering them in—was humidified to make it even more uncomfortable, and when he loosened his tie he was reminded that he was the type who felt it necessary to dress up for hospital visits, and for air flights, not so much because he had a residual primness left over from his Midwestern upbringing, which he did, but because he felt that he might receive more attentive service if he came dressed with a certain formality, so that the nurses and doctors tending his son might see him, Cavanaugh, as a big-shot banker instead of as an assistant art director who was known, if he was known at all, for his last-minute design fixes. For example, he had once turned the interior of a hotel lobby—one of the last of the classic (now defunct) S.R.O.s in midtown, the Abe Lincoln, just off Twenty-eighth and Madison—into a Victorian salon by throwing a few bolts of velvet around the windows of the downstairs smoking lobby.

Just that morning, as he was leaving for the hospital, the director, Harrison, had called to let him know that he was being dropped from "Draconian," a big-budget sci-fi production that included a huge political convention scene, filmed in an old dirigible hangar out on Long Island—a design job that had drawn upon his expertise in plastic sheeting, banners preprinted with mock structural details, and so forth. "It's not that we don't like your work," Harrison had said. "You've got fine, visionary abilities. You see things others miss. But maybe you see too much. The problem with your design was—and I don't know how to put this—it was too real, too clear. You know where I'm coming from? One wrong move cinematographically and you're lost in the future, or lodged too far in the past. We made one wrong move, and I don't want to make another. I'm not casting blame. I'm apportioning fault. If I don't do it, the audience will. You see, my hope is to keep the film, for all its futuristic overtones, closely rooted in the present moment, and that way, as I see it, the audience will feel connected to *contemporary experience* in a way that will allow the obvious *eternal* elements"—Harrison was apparently referring to the assassination attempt, and to the corrupt, smooth-talking monomaniacal presidential candidate who was secretly implanting electronic doohickeys into his opponents' temples in order to create a network of paranoid, deranged sap-souls, as he put it—"to resonate fully not only with current audiences but also with future audiences. So the trick to fostering believability lies in tweaking the extremely fine fissure between the known present and the unknowable future. If it's tweaked correctly, even years from now an audience will ignore the errors and focus only on the viable world that had once really existed, and still exists, in all human interaction."

JILL GREENBERG, "PRAYER" (2005) / PAUL KOPEIKIN GALLERY

Cavanaugh pondered all of the above—along with images from the drive that morning over the Tappan Zee Bridge and the beauty the river had held, stretching toward Tarrytown, rippled with tight wavelets, shimmering blue under a pristine sky—as he held his son, Gunner, in the sweat chamber, talked to him, got him settled, and gave him his toys, extracting them one at a time from an old green rucksack. These toys had been put aside for a few days so that they might accrue some elemental newness again and, in turn, give more in the way of pleasure. ("There are enough old toys to keep him busy," Sharon had insisted. "I can't charge another toy on the card, and I think we should build up his desire so that when Christmas comes there's not another huge letdown like there was last year. Case in point: you bought him that Gobberblaster Gun last summer, which was totally inappropriate for a kid his age and might've been a perfect gift for Christmas a couple of years from now, and he went out and shot it a few times, and now it's in the back of the closet like all his other junked toys.")

That fight about buying Gunner some new toys for the test, he thought, dabbing the sweat from his brow onto his cuff, had really been spurred on by the fact that Sharon was now back in practice, commuting into the city to scrounge clients, and taking on a disproportionate number of pro-bono cases, as if to keep the financial burden firmly on his side of the ledger, because she felt—and he knew this from their ten years together—that pressure was good for him artistically, and that he'd find the strength to break through to the big time only if he pushed against the weight of their monetary need. So he extracted one toy at a time and watched as Gunner went to the floor, tinkered and fussed and depleted each quickly, and in less than ten minutes had already gone through the Emergency Tow Truck and something called the Question Cube after two lame questions:

> What river is in Egypt? The Nile? The Hudson? The Thames? or The Kalamazoo?

And then:

> Who said: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar? Groucho Marx? William Shakespeare? Sigmund Freud? or King Edward?

before the Question Cube gave a weak static snort and faded into silence, so that little Gunner, who was really too young to know the correct answers, but who liked the sound of the toy's artificial voice—a basso profundo—and got a thrill out of guessing, stood up and, with a grunt, gave it a hard kick. Then he went on to quickly sap the Zinger, a gravity-defying top that was said to have the ability—in correct conditions—to spin eternally, and his old favorite, Mad Hamlet, a strangely compelling action figure that went into suicidal fits when you pushed a button that was hidden on its back. Only ten minutes in the sweat chamber had gone by, and all Cavanaugh could do was wait a few beats while Gunner looked up, bright with anticipation, and then cried, "I'm hot, I'm hot, I'm hot, hot, hot."

At this point, stalling for time, Cavanaugh put the rucksack out of sight behind his back and waited a few more beats before pulling it out again, saying, "Hey, hey, look, another rucksack," and shook it near the boy's head until he stopped flailing around, looked up with his ruddy face (the kid had what the doctor called dermagraphic skin—highly sensitive, prone to rashes), and said, "Give me, give me." At which point Cavanaugh unzipped the rucksack slowly, and said, "Let's pretend it's Christmas morning and we're just up, having had our traditional morning cocoa and sweet roll"—Christmas was the one morning each year that they opened up the tightly packed dough, popping it against the counter and rolling out the spiral of cardboard foil—"and now Santa's bringing some new presents," and then, with great flourish, saying, "Ta-da," he reached in and pulled out the Emergency Tow Truck again, squat and malformed, with a thick front bumper, holding it out and watching as Gunner's face composed itself around a cry, restrained itself for a second, his tiny mouth a tight rictus of pink next to which his cheeks bunched to reveal a remnant of his original baby face—womb-wet with sweat, blue with blood, and dramatically horrific. Cavanaugh searched the boy's face the way a sailor might read the twilight sky, and saw clearly that he was about to unfurl a squall-cry, a true record breaker on the scream scale. And he did. When it came, it was a squawking, ducklike sound, odd in its guttural overtones, yet paradoxically bright, shiny, and thin, like a drawn thread of hot glass. This was a cry that said: You led me to believe, fully and completely, that I was about to receive a newborn toy, something that would match my deepest expectations. This was a cry that rent open the universe and, in doing so, peeled back and exposed some soft, vulnerable tissue in Cavanaugh's brain.

So that what he did next was, he thought later, simply an act of self-protection, reaching out and yanking the boy onto his feet and into one arm and then, with the cup of his hand, sealing the kid's mouth shut, so that all Cavanaugh felt was the small, frail puffs against his palm as he spoke down into the hot, sweaty bloom of struggling face, saying, "Jesus Christ, Daddy was just playing a game, a Christmas game. Daddy was just trying to lighten the situation and keep you from doing what you're doing right now. Daddy just wants his Gunner to behave himself, if not for the sake of the nurses—who, I'm sure, are out in the hall about to bust in here to see what's going on—then for Daddy himself, who is at his wits' end and wants this test to go as smoothly as possible." At which point, as if on cue, the door opened, bringing in fresh air that smelled of disinfectant and hospital floor polish, and a nurse, beautiful in her tight uniform, with long blond hair, who said, "Oh, dear," and presented a face, he later thought, that was readable in an infinite number of ways—soft around the mouth, with a wry smile that just about verged on a frown, set in a snowy Nordic topography of bone structure. From the nose down, she seemed to be frank and non-judgmental, her mouth loose around unavailable words; from the nose up, her two intensely blue eyes, and a single raised eyebrow, seemed to be saying: Something funny's going on here. Something's not right. Something's deeply wrong about the way you're cupping the boy's mouth in relation to the way he (the boy) is standing, in relation to the way you are looming behind him, in relation to the sheen of his terrified face, in relation to that cry I heard out in the hallway, which was so loud and shrill it penetrated the door and reached my ears. And then she tilted her face slightly to one side, glanced at the room (really nothing but two chairs and a heating unit lit with stark neon), and made a face that seemed to admit: Maybe for you, as a father, this is a trying test, though it's certainly nothing compared with a bone-marrow biopsy, a spinal tap, or the claustrophobia of the MRI ring. But, yes (her face seemed to say), the analysis of the sweat in order to rule out, or to rule in, cystic fibrosis makes it oracular in nature, and in a few hours you, sir, will be offered up the results, and said results might give you a positive yes on the disease, which would mean, of course, that Gunner will face a future of hard breathing, clotted phlegm, and, most certainly, a relatively early death (in his thirties, if you're lucky), but all this in no way excuses you, sir, from what appeared to be transpiring when I passed the door and heard the cries and stepped in to take a look.

In response to what he seemed to be seeing in her facial expressions, Cavanaugh said, "We're fine, just a little misunderstanding about the toy bag, the rucksack here, regarding Christmas, pretending it's Christmas, trying to keep him calm. I mean to say," he said, as he fingered the dimple on his tie, "I was trying to recharge these toys, so to speak, to make them surprising again, you know, and Gunner became disappointed and began to cry. Not that crying isn't normal in these circumstances."

Something stony seemed to enter the nurse's features as she listened, taking another step into the room, nodding slightly, looking down at the boy and then up at Cavanaugh. Did her eyes narrow slightly? Was there a shift, barely perceptible, in the set of her teeth? Did some interrogative element enter her eyes, brightening the corneas? It seemed to him that she was thinking: We clearly have a situation here. To cup a boy's mouth like that is wrong, sinful, actually, and just a precursor to more violent acts; God knows what's going on behind closed doors. And it seemed to him that her face (and the way she moved up to Gunner and touched his head lightly, patting him, and then moved to adjust the collecting device) also said: I've seen a thousand such moments, entering rooms to witness patients adjusting their postures, ashamed, awkward around the impersonal equipment, awaiting test results that may change their future. I've entered rooms to find patients yanking out I.V. needles. I've opened the door to scenes of fornication, to urine-stained old men with pocked behinds. I've opened doors to couples enfolded in weeping embraces, so seized with grief that they had to be pried apart. I've opened doors to bald-headed children with angelic eyes and shattering smiles. But this is different because of the cry itself—the desperation and the tonal quality in relation (again) to your unusually guilty face, in relation (once again) to the boy's self-protective, conspiratorial slack expression, as if he were hiding something, in relation (once again) to the position of the hand held over the mouth, in relation to the finger marks on the flesh around the mouth. Then her lips tightened and her cheekbones—yes, cheekbones!—seemed to sharpen, and her face seemed to say to Cavanaugh: I might have to report this to the resident social worker, just as a matter of protocol. Not because I'm absolutely certain that you struck the child but because I'm *not certain*, and if I don't do it and further harm comes to this boy I'll never forgive myself and I'll sit forever down in my own particular hell.

Then the nurse said, "Oh, you poor little boy. We're a long way off from Christmas. But we're not a long way off from finishing the test. You're a brave boy. A brave, brave boy."

Woe to the man whose child is on the verge of a diagnosis, her face then seemed to say, as she ran her fingers along the tape, removed the electrode wires, cleaned Gunner's arm with a gauze pad, secured the collecting device, checked the tubing, and then, without another word, heaved out of the chamber, latched the door, tested the seal, and glanced back through the oval window with a face that said: I understand that your game with the toys in the bag was creative and a sign that you're a good father, if somewhat desperate, and then she was gone and he turned to Gunner and said, "Daddy got in trouble because you were crying. Daddy got scolded, not verbally, but facially, so

THE BACK STREETS OF MOSCOW

The farmhouse is lonely without me,
And my old dog is gone from the door;
God sent me to die in the back streets
And I can't go home anymore.

I'm in love with this overdone city,
Though it's dirty and falling apart;
It reminds me of stories at bedtime,
And the street sounds hurt my heart.

I go out for a fix after midnight,
And the fix that I'm after is fame,
So I head for a bar in the back streets
Where everyone knows my name.

It's noisy and dirty and drunken,
But nobody there drinks alone—
The bartenders buy me my vodka,
And the hookers cry at my poems.

My heart beats faster and faster,
And I say to the drunk by the door—
"I'm like you, my life's a disaster,
And I can't go home anymore."

Oh, the farmhouse is lonely without me,
And my old dog is gone from the door;
God sent me to die in the back streets
And I can't go home anymore.

—*Sergei Esenin*

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Paul Schmidt.*)

let's pretend again, and do the Christmas grab bag, but do it right this time and really pretend I'm Santa." And he opened the bag and pulled out his trump card, a toy he had left out in the first rotation, one of Gunner's all-time favorites, Weird Willy the Spasmodic Doll. When switched on, Weird Willy flexed and yawed spastically, like an injured athlete, and performed a ballet of crude movements while his internal mechanisms poked and prodded through his rubbery skin. The toy, seemingly crucified from within, proved agonizing to watch. Not long ago, back in August, Weird Willy had provided a full afternoon of entertainment in a patch of sunlight beneath the dining-room table. Gunner and Willy had spent a good hour conversing, Gunner saying softly, "Stop that, you stupid freak, you pathetic idiot, you stupid stupid." Now, in the sweat chamber, Weird Willy said, "Haa wee, haa wee," while Gunner said, "Die, die, die," and wrung Willy's torso with both hands, trying his best to tear him limb from limb.

"And that was the end of Weird Willy, the end of the toys, and the end of my Christmas-morning scheme—as I think of it now," Cavanaugh muttered to himself as he started home from the hospital, barely moving his lips over the words, imagining what he might say to his shrink, Dr. Brackett, at his next appointment. In the rearview mirror, Gunner, strapped into his safety seat, gave him a suspicious frown. Cavanaugh closed his lips and imagined saying, "When I'm with him, I'm always aware of the value timewise. I mean, in terms of using up time, of entertainment value, so to speak, of whatever catches his attention. Even when I'm not with him. For example, just a few months ago I was on location in California, working on 'Draconian,' and I was driving up the Pacific Coast Highway trying to solve a design problem. President Gleason, after his big defeat, goes off on his own for a few weeks to a cabin near Big Sur to ponder his past and begin writing his memoirs, because he sees himself—according to the script—as part of a great lineage of memoir writers stretching back to Ulysses S. Grant and, strangely, up to Jack Kerouac.

"Anyway, I envisioned the scene as a Biblical moment that mirrored Jesus' desert solitude. Something had to point away from the stereotypical writer gestures (Gleason leaning morosely over his laptop keyboard; Gleason flipping his pencil between his fingers, biting his lip, pacing the room; Gleason pouring himself a huge glass of Scotch and swirling it gently before he takes a drink) and direct the audience subtly to the deeper perplexities of his crestfallen state. So I designed chinks in the cabin's mortar that, when lit from behind, shot small beams—or maybe you'd call them shafts—of light through the walls and the dust motes, forming crosses through which he might walk during one of his pacing-for-inspiration scenes.

"In any case, I was driving up the coast, thinking about this problem, when I became acutely aware of the vista—the hard, purging waves roiling in, the whitecaps foaming far out, and the milky blue of the water—and it suddenly occurred to me that I could, with great precision, calculate the exact amount of time that Gunner would, if prompted (*Hey, Gunner, take a look at that*), examine each scene before turning away. I could decipher—is that the word?—the exact amount of entertainment value specific scenes on the coast would offer my boy. Waves slamming around hard, bountiful rocks, breaking in a dramatic foam, no matter how fantastically beautiful, would distract him for twenty-eight seconds. Sea lions—if we walked down to get a close look—would tap out at three minutes of distraction value. A frigate, viewed through a pair of field glasses? Five minutes and thirty seconds. A supertanker, not too far from shore, but in heavy surf—on the edge of trouble? Six good, solid minutes. (The field glasses would have to be new and

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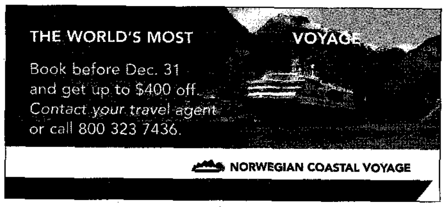
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never used before.) A frigate on fire? Seven, or possibly eight, minutes of attention. A supertanker engulfed in a raging inferno, belching a thick plume of fire? Nine. A sinking ship (with attendant oil spill and terror-stricken passengers waving frantically, some of them dashing across the deck, on fire)? Ten minutes. Albeit none of these calculations, no matter how accurate they might have felt, were really precise, because one had to go plus or minus twenty seconds on one side or the other to account for various other distractions (fiddling, scratching, eye rubbing, and snot blowing) that might cut into his attention span.

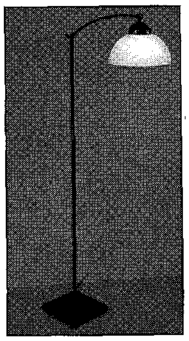
"So you see, to get to the point, when I handed him Weird Willy I had the toy figured at less than a minute. What does any of it matter, his crying, so long as he sweats enough to fill the fucking testing device, I should've thought. I should've thought, I'm lucky that my son is just crying and not spazzing out, or giving me a much harder time. I'm lucky that he's only being tested for this disease and hasn't been handed a diagnosis: terminally ill, with only a few weeks, or a day, or even less, to live, for sure, and that this is still a wide-open thing," he would tell Dr. Brackett, at his office in White Plains.

Outside, down in the street, the traffic signals would be cheeping, making a sound meant to guide the blind, if there were any. In the four years that he'd been going over the bridge to visit Dr. Brackett, he had never seen a single blind soul using the audible signals to cross the street. The streets in White Plains were always dusty and forlorn, and somehow reminded him of a Western town just before a shootout; folks were hidden away, peeking out in anticipation of violence. Even up in the office he'd feel this—while hearing the cheeping sounds—and it would form a backdrop as Dr. Brackett, a small, lean, sharp-chinned man, placed his palms on his knees and leaned forward to say something like:

"It is perfectly possible that you didn't loosen the collecting device when you grappled with your son. After all, the nurse came in and adjusted it, didn't she? You can't be blamed for that. I'm sure it happens all the time. In any case, let's focus on the wider theatrics of your parenting actions: Do you think you're the first father to cup his son around the mouth? You're a good man with a clean heart, not perfectly clean but clear (yes, a clear heart), and you had good intentions, and you were just at the end of your rope, and so you naturally felt frustrated and fearful—above all fearful, because what the test meant, most certainly, one way or another, was the central element/key/crux in the parental drama (let's call it a drama, not a play). You were fending off, or, rather, delaying for as long as possible, the end result of the test, perhaps subconsciously. You were biding your time with Gunner, trying to fend off, if I may use that phrase again, his anxiety, or what you imagined was his anxiety, by inducing play, a certain level of play, presumably, not just using up time or trying to keep him calm, as you claim, but trying to keep the scene itself stable and quiet on some level, maybe thinking, as you tried, that, in doing so, you'd also somehow, and perhaps this is a long shot"—he would admit, because Dr. Brackett, as a shrink, liked to counter and undercut his own statements as a way of enlivening them, making them seem like organic, natural formations in order to assure his patient that he was just as human as the next guy and didn't subscribe to the old formalities of Freudian methodology—"but perhaps you were also under the belief that, somehow, if you kept Gunner quiet and calm, the outcome of the test might be positively effected. Because you believed, I believe, that there were, and are, deeper factors at play—quantum/God/mystical, take your pick—and that if the test went smoothly the results were more likely to be negative. You felt, at that moment, in the sweat chamber, after the toys gave out, a sense that in the heat of the room, and in the sweat that was being exuded from Gunner's body, fate was at hand, so to speak." (Here Brackett would draw a couple of deep breaths.) "Now that you know that the results of that particular test were inconclusive because the collection device came loose and, in the end, not enough sweat was collected, you blame yourself for the fact that you've got to go back next week and again reopen that door to the question of his health, and that in doing so you must once again face the possibility that he has cystic fibrosis, and that your life will change again," Brackett would say.

"Now let's backtrack a little. The nurse, who presumably has been through many of these moments with many other patients, most likely came into the so-called sweat chamber to offer assistance, to help you in one way or another, or to remove the electrodes, and in seeing your hand over Gunner's mouth she understood your predicament and sympathized with it and with the boy's predicament, too—perhaps your own more so than the boy's—and at that moment she did not judge you as harshly as you'd like to think, but was actually waiting for you to speak, and in hearing your anger, when you did speak, and within it your deep, almost Jobian fear, felt her own helplessness before all the illness she has faced, as you were saying. Bald cancer heads, forlorn eyes, tears, kids suffering at the deepest level. Kids cheery and chipper against the saddest odds. Kids with that disjointed misunderstanding of their own place and status, not only healthwise but otherwise, too. Kids bucking themselves up heroically. Clearly, just going by the fact that you continue to mention what her Mona Lisa face seemed to be saying, almost obsessively, it seems to me, it becomes evident that you were turning to her as a soothsayer, and maybe that might mean, and here I propose this only as a theory, a useful one—perhaps, perhaps not—that she, too, felt herself to be unwillingly put into a shamanic position; no, let's correct that and say an oracular mode. Let's say she felt that her face might—from your point of view—be seen as an oracle, and let's say that that might explain the strange expressions she presented, if they really were strange."

Cavanaugh imagined all of the above as he drove back over the Hudson while Gunner slept in the back seat with his head lolling to one side and his tiny mouth open around his own breath, and, down below, the river fretted with bits of white chop as the first hard wind of the fall drove down from the North and cut past Hook Mountain on its way to the city. As he drove, he began to cry, openly and with stifled guffaws, the way a man must cry when he is faced with the future, any future, a good one or a bad one, and after he has sat alone in a room with his child, waiting for sweat to collect so that he may know something about what is to come, some exactitude in the form of a diagnosis; he cried the way a man must cry when he's driving, keeping both hands on the wheel and his eyes wide open through the blur, and he cried the way a man must cry when he is exhausted from being up deep into the night while his boy coughs up almost unbelievable quantities of phlegm, clearly succumbing to a disease process—as his doctor called it—that at that point was indeterminate; he cried for himself as much as for his son, and for the world that was unfolding to his left, an open vista, the gaping mouth of the river, which at that moment was flowing down to the sea, hurrying itself into the heart of New York Harbor. He was crying like a man on a bridge—suspended between two sides of life, trapped in the blunt symbolism of the spans, and atop the floating pylons that sustained the decks of reinforced concrete—while his son slept soundly, unburdened now, it seemed, when Cavanaugh looked back at him in the mirror, and afloat on his own slumber. Not at all sick, or diseased, and free from whatever torment the future might offer up. By the time (three minutes later) that Cavanaugh was exiting off the thruway and driving down Main Street (six minutes later), past the stately trees unfurling their fall brilliance, he had collected himself and was clear-eyed and in a new state. He wasn't a man reborn at all. Not even close. That would come much later, after the second test, and when the results were in, conclusive and hard, no-nonsense in the statement they made. That would come (he imagined) when he gave himself over to the fact that salt moved chaotically in and out of certain cells, and that Gunner's body would forever confront certain facts: mucus blockages in his lungs and pancreas, and frequent infections. But for now, as he entered the town on a beautiful fall day, the diagnosis was somewhere off in the remote future, and he was alive and dealing with the moment at hand, which included his own actions in the sweat room, and the failure of his set design for the convention scene, and he felt himself growing calm before the sweet presence in the back seat, which came to him in the form of a soft snore, a little clicking sound that accompanied each exhalation, and then, finally, a small groan as the car settled over the curb of the driveway (eight minutes later) and came to a stop, and then another slight sniff as his boy awoke (one minute later), roused by the silence, the lack of road noise, and opened his eyes and blinked, and then said, "Are we home? Are we home now, Dad?" ♦



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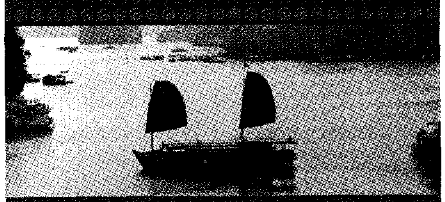

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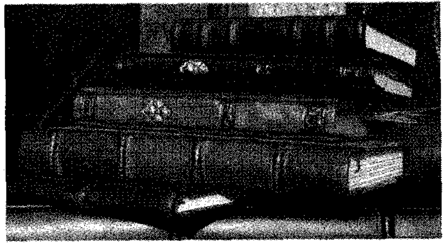

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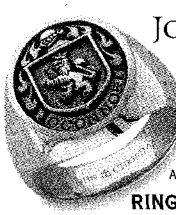

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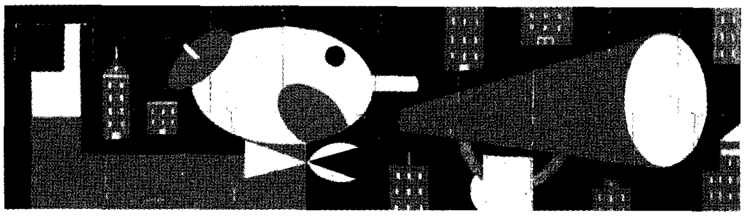


A CRITIC AT LARGE

GOODNIGHT MUSH

The year in picture books.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

If, as Joan Didion famously put it, "we tell ourselves stories in order to live," why do we tell stories to our children? In my experience, mostly it is to get them to shut up. A book read to a toddler who, after running around the house all day, has had to be stuffed, quite literally, into his pajamas, may traffic in imaginative freedom and wonder, but it is still an instrument of control. I will read this to you, and then you will go to sleep. End of story.

The tension, or, if you prefer, bad faith implicit in this arrangement is itself one of the great themes of bedtime literature, and many of the tales now regarded as classics celebrate children as artists (and artists as children), only, in the end, to sell them both out. Harold decides one night to use his crayon to escape his room. He summons up a frightening dragon, nine kinds of pie, and a hot-air balloon that will carry him to a strange city, before drawing himself a bed and climbing into it. Max sails "in and out of weeks and almost over a year" to a kingdom where his wildness can be appreciated. After just one rumpus, loneliness sets in, and he goes sailing home. The same story keeps getting told over and over, much as the same struggle gets played out night after night. Madeline taunts the tiger at the zoo, teeters on a railing over the Seine, and goes under the knife for an emergency appendectomy. Then, abruptly, Miss Clavel turns off the light and closes the door: "That's all there is—there isn't any more." Frances keeps putting off sleep with one tactic—call it imaginative, call it neurotic—after another. Eventually, convinced that something ferocious is lurking behind the curtains, she slips quietly into her parents' room—so quietly that her father wakes up with a start. A discussion ensues:

> "Listen, Frances, do you want to know why the curtains are moving?"
>
> "Why?" said Frances.
>
> "That is the wind's job," said Father. "Every night the wind has to go around and blow all the curtains. . .
>
> "*Everybody* has a job," said Father. "I have to go to my office every morning at nine o'clock. That is my job. You have to go to sleep so you can be wide awake for school tomorrow. That is *your* job."
>
> Frances said, "I know, but . . ."
>
> Father said, "I have not finished. If the wind does not blow the curtains, he will be out of a job. If I do not go to the office, I will be out of a job. And if you do not go to sleep now, do you know what will happen to you?"
>
> "I will be out of a job?" said Frances.
>
> "No," said Father.
>
> "I will get a spanking?" said Frances.
>
> "Right!" said Father.

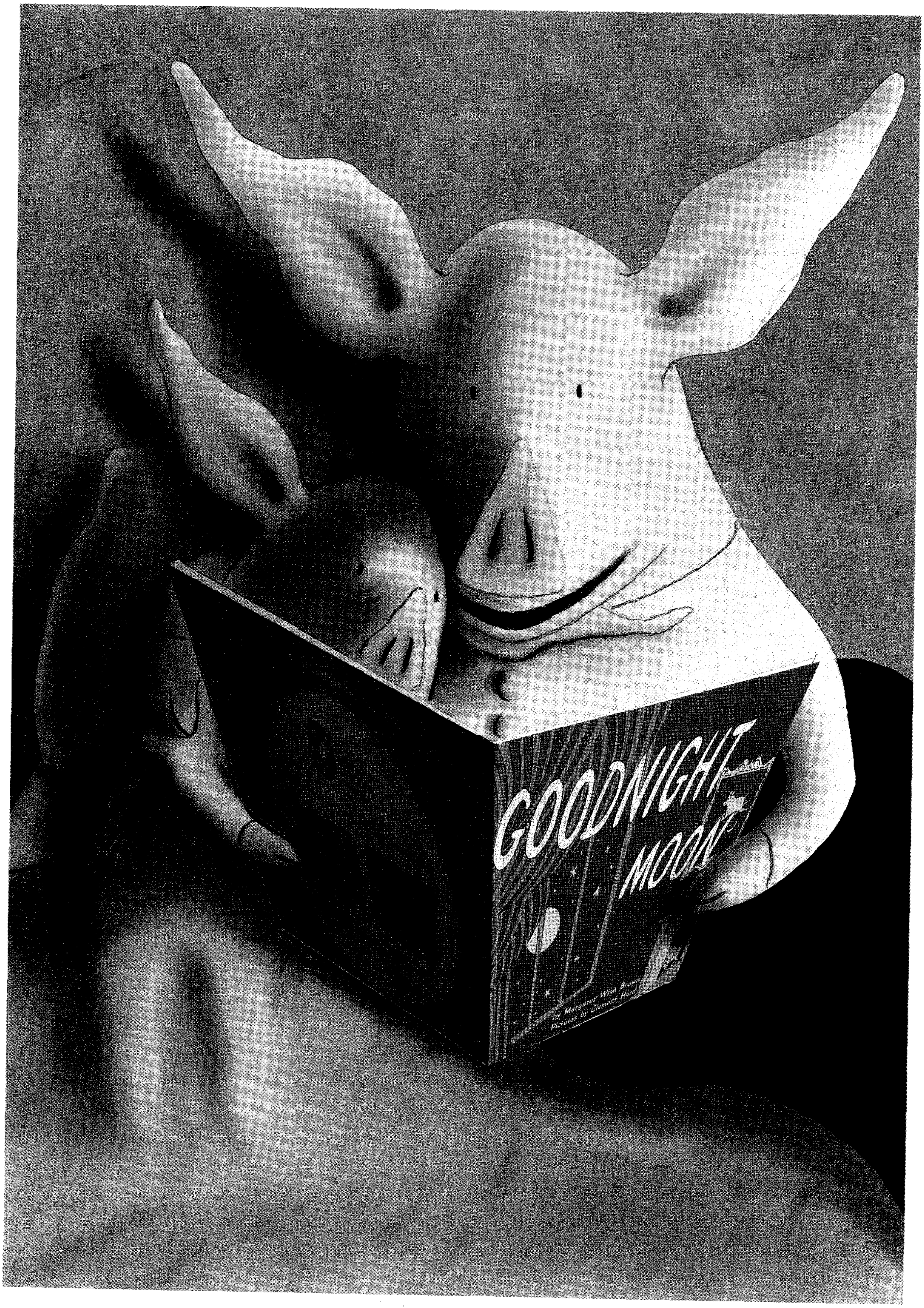
"Bedtime for Frances" was published in 1960. As a child born the following year, I identified with its heroine, both because of her insomnia and because of her domestic situation. (Waking my father in the middle of the night was not considered a bright idea.) My own children have a much harder time relating to Frances, but they love versions of the story that reflect their own experience. In "Max's Bedtime," first published in 1985, the authority figure is a figure with almost no authority. Ruby wears herself out trying to get her little brother to go down for the night, until, finally, she collapses, while Max, wide awake, plays with his red rubber elephant. The eponymous gorilla of "Good Night, Gorilla" (1994) releases himself from the zoo, gets locked up again, then escapes for a second time, along with his banana-toting sidekick. On the last page, the animals are uncaged and—I assume—like more and more kids across America, still fooling around after the adults have conked out. These stories for the post-spanking set aren't just funnier; they allow for the possibility that bedtime could be genuinely comedic, that the old order could be uprooted and the fool become the king, which, if my house is any indication, nowadays happens all the time.

Thousands of new picture books will be published this year, and, just as with adult fiction, some of these will be remarkable, some dreadful, and the vast majority will fall into the murky region in between. "Olivia Forms a Band" (Atheneum; $17.95) is the latest installment in Ian Falconer's wildly successful series. In previous adventures, the precocious piglet has painted, danced, and tamed lions. This time, she expresses herself musically, and, as usual, her family suffers for her art; at one point her father finds himself standing with his trousers around his ankles because Olivia has requisitioned his suspenders. Olivia is uncowed till the end; as she drifts off to sleep, dreaming of becoming a Supreme Court Justice, her mother stumbles over the cymbals she has left scattered on the floor. This, I guess, is supposed to represent progress.

"Olivia" is drawn with high, manic energy and is hiply multimedia. (Her dream consists of a drawing inside a photo inside a drawing.) "Art," by Patrick McDonnell (Little, Brown; $14.99), tells the same basic story, all in primary colors. Its protagonist—a boy named Art—draws all of "Art" 's pictures, a play on words that is pushed to punishing extremes: "Art and his art/Can you tell them apart?" One minute, Art is zigzagging exuberantly across the page, the next he has fallen asleep.

A third retelling, Peter McCarty's "Moon Plane" (Henry Holt; $16.95), is soothingly traditional, both in style and in subject. The drawings are done in pencil

One of the great themes of bedtime stories is going to bed, or, really, figuring out ways to put off going to bed.


GOODNIGHT MOON
by Margaret Wise Brown
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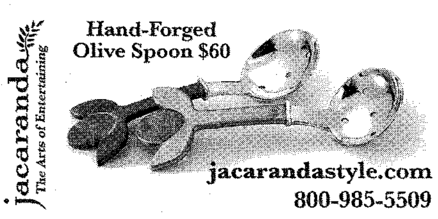
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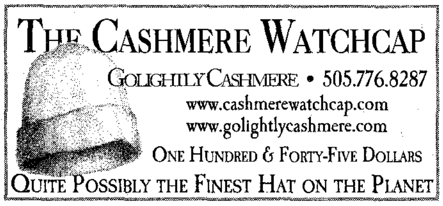
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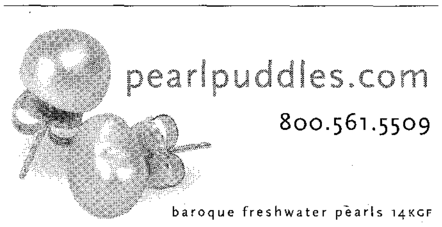
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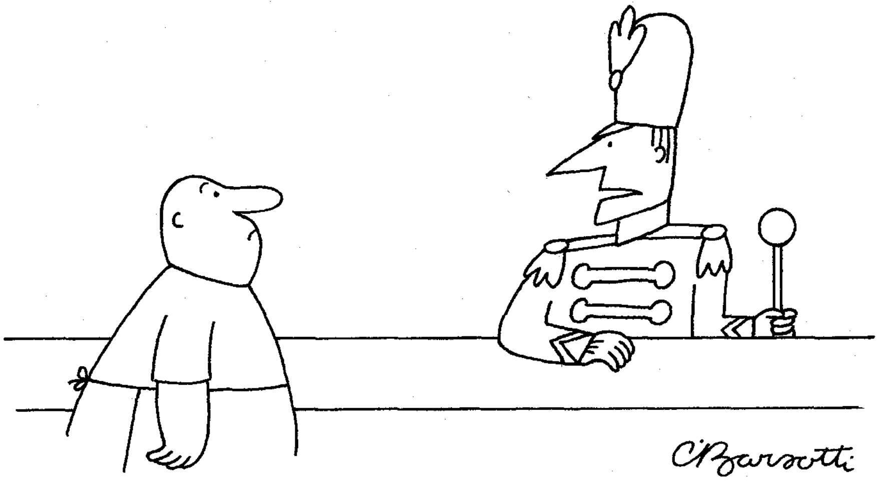
on watercolor stock, which gives the impression of a world seen through waxed paper. The book's hero is a boy, circa 1950, who sees a plane and wonders at the novelty. What would it be like to fly? The imaginative experience takes him all the way to the moon, where, weightlessly, he leaps into the heavens. Then, it's time for the journey to run in reverse, and for this small boy, too, to make his way to bed, where he can continue to dream of planes soaring "high into the sky."

Retro is always big in children's books, which probably shouldn't be a surprise, given who's buying them. Currently on the shelves are fiftieth-anniversary editions of "Harry the Dirty Dog," "Eloise," and "Harold and the Purple Crayon," as well as a sixtieth-anniversary edition of "Stuart Little" and a sixty-fifth-anniversary edition of "Little House on the Prairie." Among this year's reissues are Richard Wilbur's "Opposites, More Opposites, and a Few Differences" (Harcourt; $10.95), first published in 1973, and Munro Leaf's "Noodle," illustrated by Ludwig Bemelmans (Scholastic; $15.99), which came out in 1937.

For "Probuditi" (Houghton Mifflin; $18.95), Chris Van Allsburg reaches back to the days of Erector sets, fedoras, and Mary Janes. Allsburg uses this supposedly simpler time to tell a supposedly simple tale of a boy who builds a hypnosis machine. But, as is the case with other Van Allsburg books—"Jumanji," "The Mysteries of Harris Burdick," even "The Polar Express"—there's something sinister and adult about the whole uncanny apparatus. In Van Allsburg's masterly sepia-toned drawings, the action always seems to be observed from the wrong angle. That the boy, Calvin, is black, has no particular significance as far as the plot is concerned, but it still feels awkwardly relevant, especially when Calvin gets his little sister to act like a dog, leading to disagreement about whether she should be called a "mutt."

David Wiesner's "Flotsam" (Clarion Books; $17) is explicitly fantastical, and, like the artist's earlier books—"Tuesday" and "Sector 7"—is told without words. True to its title, the book gathers conceits washed overboard from half a dozen genres: octopuses sit on underwater sofas, aliens visit from Mars, and giant starfish wade through the waves. Holding things together—I use this phrase loosely—is a tale about a boy who happens upon a barnacle-encrusted box camera and develops the film inside. One photo shows a child holding a photo of a child holding a photo of a child, and so on. He puts the photo under a microscope and, by enlarging it seventy times, finally arrives at an image of a boy standing around unhappily at some *Mitteleuropäisch* beach resort of the late nineteenth century. (Kafka on the Shore?) The implication—I think—is that the readers of "Flotsam" are part of this same ongoing journey.

Buying a picture book is a bit like buying Parisian lingerie, or pet food: you can't (or at least shouldn't) use the product all on your own. Do parents choose the books their children will actually like, or the ones it pleases them to think they will? Recently, one of my sons brought home from second grade a story that he'd written at school. It told about a trip through the Drake Passage by a crew of



"The others will be along in a moment."

six friends. Before breakfast, the first one has fallen overboard.

"Gosh Juans dead all ready its only been an hour," a character named Kan declares. Another crew member is soon lost to a huge fish. "Uh oh thats not good." Finally, when there's not enough food for dinner, one of the remaining friends gets eaten. "Now lets go to bed," says someone, maybe the laconic Kan, or maybe one of the other fine young cannibals.

The question of propriety—whether children's books should be as disgusting and violent as children—is a genuinely vexing one. On one side are what might be called the protectionists, who argue, in effect, that what children really like doesn't much matter. After all, if you let kids do what they want, they wouldn't read a book in the first place. To this group what's important is *childhood*, a hypothetical state of innocence and fancy.

"Museum Trip" (Houghton Mifflin; $15), by Barbara Lehman, is a good example of a work aimed at the protectionist market. Like "Flotsam," it is wordless. A boy gets separated from his class at an art museum and finds himself in a room devoted to images of labyrinths. Soon he is transported inside the labyrinths, where he is awarded a medal for solving them. His reverie ends, and things return to normal, except that as he leaves the museum with the rest of the class he's wearing the medal around his neck. Part Magritte, part Crockett Johnson, Antoinette Portis's "Not a Box" (HarperCollins; $12.99) similarly explores the border between the real and the imagined. A young rabbit finds an empty cardboard box, which becomes, in his mind, a burning skyscraper, a robot, a crow's nest on a pirate ship, and the gondola of a hot-air balloon. The simple line drawings are all done in red and black—black being an adult's sense of the world, red being the rabbit's. In a refreshing twist, there's no twist at the end. The book finishes with the bunny still defiant: "It's my Not-a-Box!"

"Luck," by Jean Craighead George (Laura Geringer Books; $16.99), is a protectionist tale that finds its subject—a young sandhill crane—in the natural world. The crane is rescued from a plastic six-pack holder by a girl in Texas and then joins his parents for their flight to Asia. When he finds a mate—Wise—they return to Texas, where they meet the girl again. The paintings, by Wendell Minor, sometimes depict the cranes as seen by an earthbound observer, sometimes the earth as seen by an airborne crane. Dianna Aston's "An Egg Is Quiet" (Chronicle Books; $16.95) is also about birds, not to mention dogfish and ladybugs and sea turtles and leopard frogs. The charm of this nonfiction work lies in its vaguely Victorian illustrations, by Sylvia Long, and in the fact that eggs are fascinating. Inverting the usual formula, the story ends not with animals going to sleep but awakening to life: "An egg is quiet. Then, suddenly . . . an egg is noisy!"

"Walter the Farting Dog Goes on a Cruise" (Dutton; $16.99), it seems safe to say, is destined not for the protectionist bookshelf but, rather, for the ever-growing permissive market, where anything goes—and nothing goes over better than flatulence. (The original "Walter the Farting Dog," published in 2001, has sold more than a million copies.) In his latest adventure—a work that, amazingly enough, demanded the collaboration of three writers and an illustrator—Walter takes a trip aboard an ocean liner called the Sea Wind. He farts and farts. Do you need to know more?

Protectionists may also turn up their noses at "Gee Whiz! It's All About Pee," written by Susan E. Goodman and illustrated by Elwood H. Smith (Viking; $15.99). But they'd be wrong to. "Gee Whiz!" is well researched, informative, and only moderately gross. (The volume is a follow-up to "The Truth About Poop," by the same pair.) Were you aware, for example, that there are clouds of frozen astronaut piss orbiting the earth? Or that the Pilgrims used a substance known as "chamber lye"—urine mixed with ashes—to wash their clothes? I wasn't, and I'm glad (sort of) that I am now.

Do children love scatology for its own sake, or for an even more fundamental reason—because it irritates adults? Lane Smith, who illustrated the by now canonical "The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales," caters to kids' desire to make fun of everything, including, naturally enough, stories for kids. His latest

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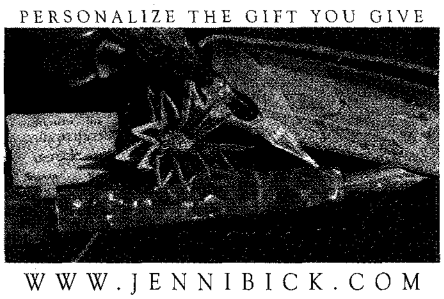
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work, "John, Paul, George & Ben" (Hyperion; $16.99), a freewheeling parody of the patriotic children's books that once made America great, is a portrait of the Founding Fathers as young brats. To create its faux-antiquarian effect, Smith makes use of parchment paper, Colonial typefaces, and portraits by John Singleton Copley and Gilbert Stuart. Ben is Benjamin Franklin, who even as a child "considered it his duty to provide frequent, free advice." Smith includes some genuine Franklinian aphorisms—"Three can keep a secret if two of them are dead"—then allows the lad's neighbors to deliver a saying especially for Ben: "Please shut your big yap!"

Picture-book sentimentality provides the barn-size target for "Love You When You Whine" (Frances Foster Books; $15), by Emily Jenkins, illustrated by Sergio Ruzzier. The main characters are a mother cat and her thoroughly unbearable, totally ordinary daughter. Page after page recounts the daughter's misdeeds, from whining and mess-making through hair-pulling and tantrum-throwing, as the same formula is repeated: "Love you when you pour cereal on the floor. . . . Love you when you spread jam on my computer." It's all very ironic, until the final page, when the little cat goes to bed and the mother cat smiles for the first time.

On the cover of Terry Pratchett's "Where's My Cow?" (HarperCollins; $16.95) is an anatomically correct Holstein, seen from behind. Inside, a father reads to his son from a cutesy, pastel-colored picture book called "Where's My Cow?," by an author named Terry Pratchett. As this arrangement suggests, Pratchett's story is a postmodern fable all about the protectionist/permissive conflict. Halfway through, the father has an epiphany. Why is his son learning about "moo-cows and baa-lambs?" he wonders. "He is growing up in a city. He will only see them on a plate! They go *sizzle!*" At this point, the fluffy farm animals are replaced by hardened criminals, tubercular beggars, and peddlers pushing adulterated meats. Even so, the book ends with the boy sleeping soundly in his little blue crib.

The mother of all bedtime stories, "Goodnight Moon," by Margaret Wise Brown, will turn sixty next year, but the official anniversary edition is already out (HarperTrophy; $6.99). To return to it after reading six or seven dozen of the latest picture books is a bit of a shock. As you might expect, "Goodnight Moon" is more restrained, more exacting, and more lyrical than anything written for children today. In its own quiet way, it is also more brutal.

At the time that it appeared, Brown was thirty-seven and a well-established children's writer; among her many acclaimed picture books were "The Runaway Bunny" and "Little Fur Family." Still, she didn't quite fit, or want to fit, the role of beloved children's author; her real ambition was to write for grownups. Brown never married—her affairs were conducted with members of both sexes—and had no children. When she wasn't making up tales about soft little bunnies, she liked to watch them get ripped to pieces; a fan of running to hounds, Brown was a charter member of an exclusive Long Island hunting club known as the Buckram Beagles. (Asked about this apparent conflict in an interview with *Life*, Brown replied, "Well, I don't especially like children, either. At least not as a group. I won't let anybody get away with anything just because he is little.") Reportedly, Brown wrote "Goodnight Moon" in a single morning.

The struggle between parent and child that is the explicit subject of so many bedtime stories is, in "Goodnight Moon," only implicit. Indeed, there's no parent on the scene. The story begins with the little rabbit, drawn with wonderful flatness by Clement Hurd, already in bed. It is seven o'clock. A few pages later, according to the blue clock on the mantelpiece and the yellow clock on the bed table, it is seven-twenty. Then it is seven-thirty, then seven-forty. When the "good-nighting" begins, it is not clear who is doing the speaking. The moon is rising, yet the light grows dimmer. The clocks tick on—seven-fifty, eight o'clock.

A parent is bigger than a child, but still a person. He or she can be appealed to, as in "Bedtime for Frances," or even tricked, as in "Good Night, Gorilla." The arrangement in "Goodnight Moon" is completely uneven. Time moves forward, and the little bunny doesn't stand a chance. Parent and child are, in this way, brought together, on tragic terms. You don't want to go to sleep. I don't want to die. But we both have to. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Book of Dave, *by Will Self (Bloomsbury; $24.95).* In this tale of an embittered taxi-driver whose psychotic rantings become the creed of a blighted people hundreds of years after his death, Self unleashes his apparently boundless misanthropy on modern London, the origins of religion, and the postapocalyptic future. Dave Rudman, driven mad by divorce and ill-prescribed antidepressants, thinks he is God and writes a vitriolic screed, which he has printed on metal plates and buries in a garden. Discovered by the survivors of a catastrophic flood and adopted as a gospel, it demands the complete separation of mothers and fathers (children to spend exactly half the week with each). Switching between a narrative of Dave's unlucky life and the phonetically rendered "Mokni" speech of his wretched followers, Self achieves an elaborate vision of vicious superstition and hopeless struggle, but his insights never quite repay the effort of engaging with his stylistic pyrotechnics.

The Aeneid, *by Virgil, translated from the Latin by Robert Fagles (Viking; $40).* Fagles's new version of Virgil's epic delicately melds the stately rhythms of the original to a contemporary cadence. Having previously produced well-received translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, he illuminates the poem's Homeric echoes while remaining faithful to Virgil's distinctive voice. Pious Aeneas, passionate Dido, and raging Turnus are driven by the desires and rivalries of the gods—but even the gods recognize their obeisance to fate, and to the foretold Roman Empire that will produce Augustus, Virgil's patron. The excellent introduction, by Bernard Knox, gives historical and literary context, and both Knox and Fagles convincingly argue the epic's continuing relevance. Fagles, writing of Virgil's sense of "the price of empire," notes that "it seems to be a price we keep on paying, in the loss of blood and treasure, time-worn faith and hard-won hope, down to the present day."

Woodward and Bernstein, *by Alicia C. Shepard (Wiley; $24.95).* Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein will always be famous for their part in untangling the Watergate scandal. Shepard, though, is far more interested in what happened afterward, and in examining the uneasy rewards of early success. Her prose can be clichéd, but her biographical curiosity is large; she seems to have interviewed almost everyone with a connection to her subjects. Other journalists played important roles in ending the Nixon Presidency, Shepard notes, but it was the film version of "All the President's Men," a retelling that left several colleagues feeling slighted, that enshrined "Woodstein" in "fame and glory." When the pair sold their papers to the University of Texas, for about five million dollars, one observer noted that they had become "as much a part of the story of Watergate and historical record as any of the people they reported on."

The Architecture of Happiness, *by Alain de Botton (Pantheon; $25).* Determined to avoid the "two great dogmas of aesthetics"—that there is only one valid visual style, and that all styles are equally acceptable—de Botton explores how particular works of architecture succeed, by offering "more or less adequate responses to our genuine psychological needs." Loosely adopting a set of criteria, or "virtues"—order, balance, elegance, coherence, and self-knowledge—he delineates the merits of, for instance, Herzog & de Meuron's 1988 Stone House, in Liguria, whose exposed concrete frame saves rough, mortarless rock from "rustic incoherence." Conversely, he excoriates the folly of Nagasaki's massive Huis ten Bosch Dutch Village, a theme park containing a complete replica of The Hague's royal palace. De Botton is a lively guide, and his eclectic choices of buildings and locations evince his conclusion, that "we should be as unintimidated by architectural mediocrity as we are by unjust laws."

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THE ART WORLD

FROCKS AND BLOCKS

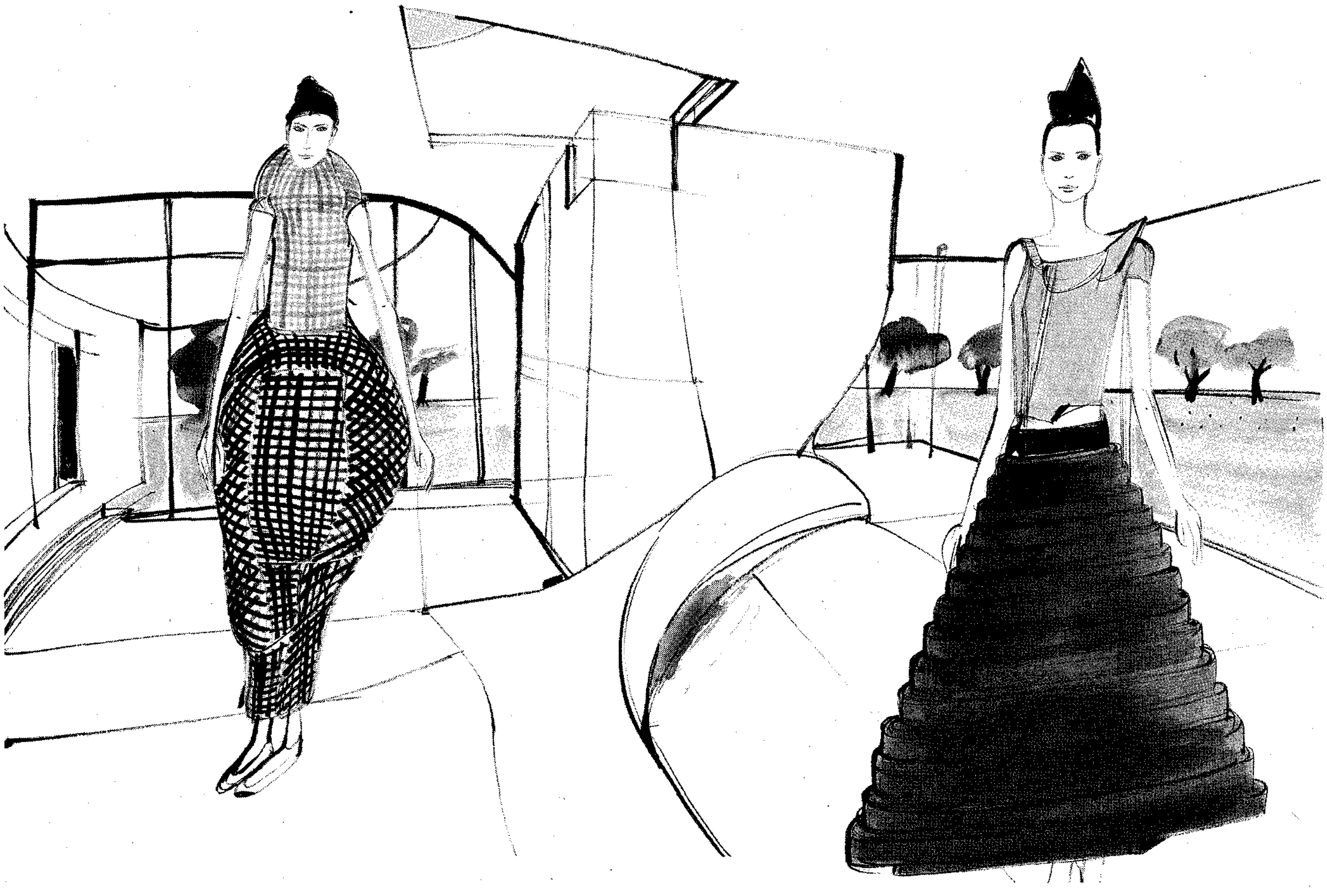
Fashion meets architecture in Los Angeles.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

The fashion world is commonly accused of taking itself too seriously. An ambitious show that opened last week at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art suggests that it may not be taking itself seriously enough. "Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture" is the first exhibition of its scale and kind—more than three hundred contemporary works by forty-six mostly avant-garde architects and designers, chosen to represent what Brooke Hodge, MOCA's curator of architecture and design, calls the "increasingly fruitful dialogue" between the two disciplines.

Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown, the architects who designed the installation, reconfigured MOCA's cramped galleries as a spacious labyrinth. "Architecture supplies the gravitas, and fashion delivers the big bang, so that's where we start," Tsao told me. Mannequins, fashion videos, and a small stage set of Hussein Chalayan's wearable living-room furniture (a telescoping wooden coffee table that becomes a skirt, and slipcovered chairs that convert into suitcases and dresses in case you have to leave town on short notice) introduce the general themes of "body," "shelter," and "identity." Visitors then thread their way through exhibits of increasing complexity that compare the "tectonic strategies" (i.e. construction techniques) of both disciplines. "The clothes have a visceral impact that the buildings don't," Tsao acknowledged, "and only in part because they're physically present, while the architecture is represented by models and graphics. Our profession tends to be too hermetic. It has a lot to learn about relating to actual human beings."

An apparent likeness between human beings isn't proof of an actual, or even mimetic, kinship, and the same is true of their creations. Do the "cables" that hoist the skirt of Yeohlee Teng's poetic Suspension Dress relate, except semantically, to the structural engineering of Bernard Tschumi's suspended walkways at the Parc de la Villette, in Paris? Do the pleated façade of Winka Dubbeldam's Greenwich Street Project and a pleated day dress by Alber Elbaz have anything in common besides elegance? What about the lacy skin of Toyo Ito's Mikimoto Tower, in Tokyo? Is it conversing with Tess Giberson's abstract crochet work? The beauty and invention on display in "Skin + Bones" dispose one, perhaps too readily, to nodding in compliance at the alleged parallels between Martin Margiela's disjointed patchworks and Frank Gehry's anarchic



Rei Kawakubo's stretch gingham dress, Hussein Chalayan's skirt/table, and an interior of Preston Scott Cohen's Torus house.

FILIPE JARDIM

jigsaw puzzles, or between the shard-like angles of Zaha Hadid's Vitra fire station and the jaggedly cantilevered shirt collars by the Dutch partners Viktor & Rolf, and I was willing to suspend—or cantilever—my disbelief to perceive, in the arboreal spread of Yohji Yamamoto's wedding gown, an effort to unite the party tent and the chuppah in one ensemble. But is one really looking at the skin and bones of a new hybrid species, or the anatomy of a metaphor?

Architecture critics have already started to grumble about the tenuous nature of the connections made in "Skin + Bones," but the fashion world is well served by it. On the runway, inspired feats of virtuosity are all too often quickly forgotten by blasé audiences rushing to the next show. Here they are treated with informed reverence, beginning with the Russian Doll ensemble by Viktor & Rolf, which greets visitors in the first gallery. Eight mannequins on a round platform display the nesting layers, each a masterpiece of couture, that were originally fitted on a live model during Paris fashion week in 1999. In a video of the performance projected behind the clothes, the designers dress an immobile girl standing on a lazy Susan in successively heavier and more ornamental robes, transforming a nubile waif wearing the barest scrap of a jute shift into a royal mummy shrouded by a majestic cloak that seems molded of clay. It is an act of self-mockery and, perhaps, social criticism as much as an advertisement for the label: fashion as architecture entombing woman as it enshrines her.

The fashion retrospectives mounted by major art museums like the Guggenheim and the Met have typically been celebrations of a style, a period, or a couturier (often lavishly subsidized by its subject). The Frick examined the relations of costume to portraiture, and to changing standards of propriety, three years ago, in "Whistler, Women, and Fashion." A number of specialized institutions here and abroad, including the Cooper-Hewitt and the Victoria & Albert, have entertained contemporary fashion in the context of other visual arts—and Hodge acknowledges her debt to "Intimate Architecture," an exhibit of conceptual body-housing curated by Susan Sidlauskas, in 1982, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Hayden Gallery. But "Skin + Bones" stands to attract, if not reconcile, two camps that rarely converge in a gallery: the followers of fashion, who prefer their nests feathered, and the austere draftsmen in Bauhaus glasses, who may privately relish the charms of a scarlet woman such as fashion but balk at entertaining her in polite company. "Ten years ago, I couldn't have organized a show like this," Hodge told me. "Many architects would have been leery of lending their work to it. They didn't know what avant-garde designers were doing, or assumed that it was frivolous. But the younger generation tends to know more about fashion than designers know about architecture. They've grown up with its influence, and the question of legitimacy doesn't arise."

"Skin + Bones" starts with the unexceptional premise that fashion and architecture are, if not equals, cognates—related languages with a common root. They both translate a two-dimensional pattern of abstract shapes into a seamed, three-dimensional volume. It is probable that birds' nests and spiders' webs inspired the first weavers and thatchers, and most of the garments ever made have been fabricated from some sort of loomed or knitted textile. Their archaic function was to provide a substitute for the scales that mammals left on the shore. The clothing of early humans (and of many contemporary nomads)—skins draped over a bony frame—was a trimmer version of their tents, though almost anything we wear could be construed, as it is in this show, as a "portable shelter." Bikinis and burkas, in that respect, both mediate between the public and private zones of a body the way that a wall or a screen does—inviting or denying access to strangers.

Durable edifices are rarely, at least in the West, constructed of fragile materials, but "hard" and "soft" are no longer the defining properties of either architecture or fashion. The British designer Alexander McQueen is represented in the catalogue by a one-piece molded "carapace" with a metallic pony-hair fringe that resembles a yurt. Shigeru Ban's Curtain Wall House is literally that: a Tokyo residence with a curtain wall of white drapery. Carbon Tower, a high-rise by Peter Testa and Devyn Weiser, gifted partners based in Los Angeles, is still in the planning stage, but they hope to con-

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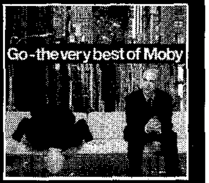

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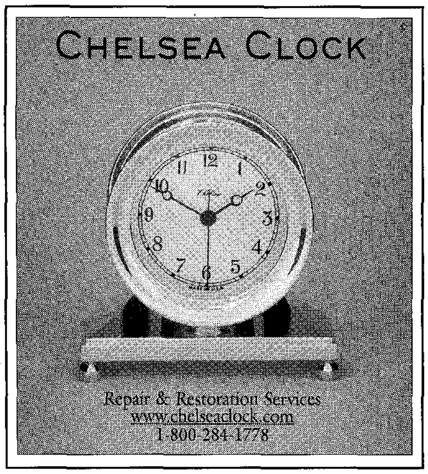
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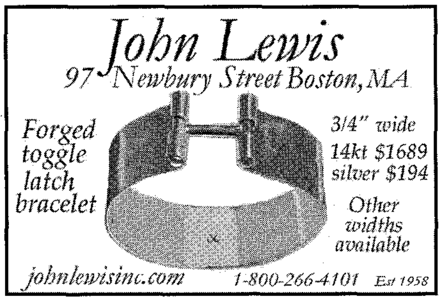
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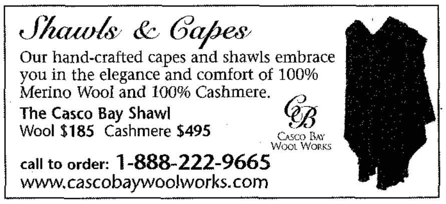
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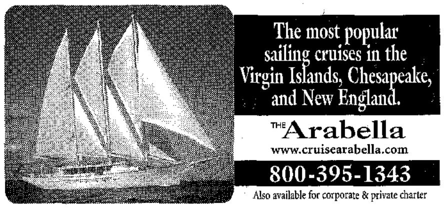
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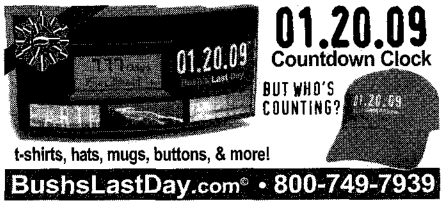
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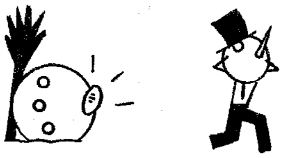
struct it from a braided carbon-fibre helix, which resembles a fishnet stocking. Theirs is a cityscape made sensuous by technology, rather than brutalized by it, although nothing may be more old-fashioned about visionary architecture than its utopianism.

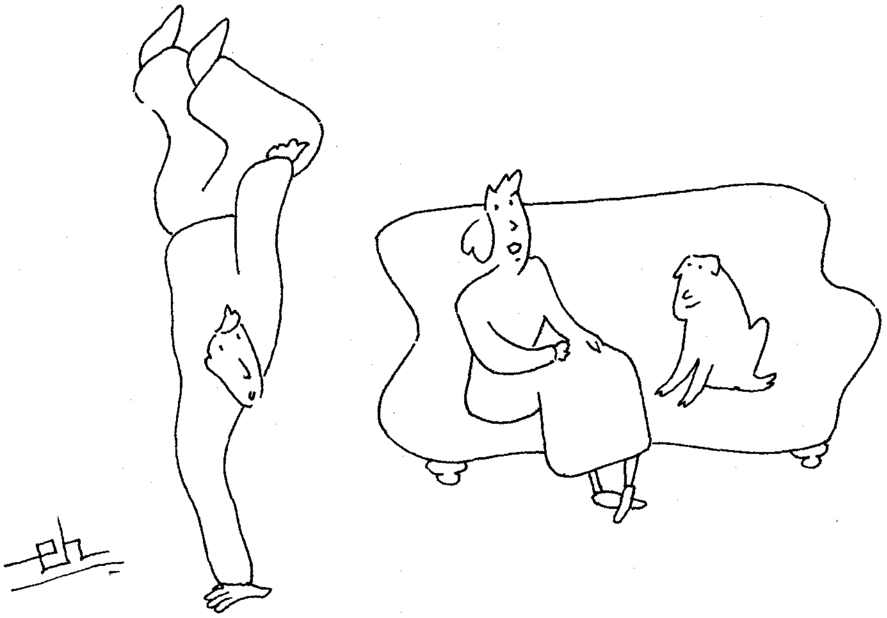
In nearly every culture that covers its nudity and lives under a roof, fashion and architecture are vested with the power to confer status and encode identity—services that, of late, they have performed conspicuously for each other. It is almost de rigueur for a big luxury clothing brand to commission a flagship store or corporate headquarters from an architect with a museum, civic monument, or Pritzker Prize on his résumé, and the competition among the would-be Medicis of fashion to outclass one another architecturally has come to resemble a medieval joust. The French mogul Bernard Arnault reportedly enlisted Frank Gehry to design the Louis Vuitton Foundation for Creation's contemporary-arts center after Karl Lagerfeld warned him that Tadao Ando, a knight high on Arnault's list, had been tapped by an arch-rival, François Pinault, of P.P.R., which owns the Gucci Group. The Prada boutiques in SoHo and Beverly Hills were designed by OMA/Rem Koolhaas. But Prada, for its six-level emporium in Tokyo (don't call it a department store; it's an "epicenter"), jilted Koolhaas for the Swiss firm of Herzog & de Meuron. Their five-sided, diamond-faceted, nib-shaped edifice with "bubble-wrap" windows has become a landmark in Tokyo's Aoyama district, and Hodge includes it with two other starred attractions on a shopping tour of that city: Toyo Ito's Mikimoto Tower and his retail space for Tod's—a lyrical trellis of concrete and glass on Omotesando Avenue that mirrors the Japanese elms on the sidewalk. Architecture has bequeathed to fashion marketing the notion of an aesthetically coherent—though one might also say micromanaged—environment. It sometimes makes one nostalgic for the chaos of the souk.

The disparities between fashion and architecture are, if anything, heightened by proximity: one trades in ephemerality, the other in permanence; their cultural prestige is grossly unequal, but inversely proportional to the name recognition of their stars; a great building might take a decade to build, a great collection takes at most six months to make, and it isn't paid for up front. Even the most cerebral garments in the show—Isabel Toledo's ingenious, circular Packing Dress; the digitally designed origami Bellows dresses by Yoshiki Hishinuma; Junya Watanabe's Objet collection; Ralph Rucci's exquisite couture mosaics; the seamless sculptures by Miyake Issey and Nanni Strada (an undeservedly obscure Milanese industrial designer in her sixties who "loves fashion and hates the fashion world," she told me)—are constructed by methods that a civilian can comprehend. But the distorted "oblique projections" that produced the elevations for Preston Scott Cohen's dreamlike Torus house, planned for Old Chatham, New York ("a doughnut shape generated by revolving a circle along a coplanar axis"), or the theory behind Peter Eisenman's unbuilt Rebstockpark residential and commercial development in Frankfurt (based on "the idea of the 'fold' as set forth by the chaos-theorist René Thom and philosopher Gilles Deleuze's examination of Gottfried Leibniz's monad"), might as well be rocket science.

Revolutions in construction and fabric technology have made it possible for architects to incorporate techniques like folding, pleating, wrapping, printing, braiding, and draping, though none of these are new to fashion, and, with a few exceptions, the designers work with the traditional tools of tailoring and dressmaking, putting them to wildly playful or subversive use. Conventional high fashion appeals to a client who finds a designer's style congenial to her body and her life. The clothing in "Skin + Bones" is perhaps most akin to architecture in its appropriation of the body as a site. On it or around it, the designer constructs a singular and demanding conceptual garment that attracts notice for its own unsettling distinction. You wear it less because it suits you than because you are proud to uphold—literally—its principles.

The architects and designers in the show represent twenty-four nationalities, though the Japanese are proportionally





"Big deal, Joe—you've still got it, but I never said that I still wanted it."

• •

the largest contingent. Their prominence is not an accident. They are less beholden to Western canons of design, and their tradition doesn't discriminate between the fine and the applied arts. Hodge began thinking about the parallels between the disciplines six years ago, when she organized an exhibition at Harvard of Rei Kawakubo's radically warped and distressed work for Comme des Garçons. Kawakubo and the companion of her youth, Yohji Yamamoto, have never collaborated professionally, but they are the Eve and Adam from whose loins the contemporary fashion avant-garde was born. Their first shows in Paris, like Gehry's buildings, changed the urban landscape—though in both cases you had to be in the right neighborhood to see them.

Most of the architects in "Skin + Bones" emerged at about the same time, the early nineteen-eighties—a period of experiments with "deconstruction." Jacques Derrida coined the term in his writing on linguistics, and parallel essays in the show's catalogue—on architecture, by Hodge, and on fashion, by Patricia Mears, of the Fashion Institute of Technology—treat that pliable theory as the show's intellectual bridge. As Mears notes, references to "deconstructed" clothing appeared in fashion criticism in the early nineteen-nineties, to describe the next, and predominantly Belgian, wave of iconoclasm—in particular, Martin Margiela's fusion of structure and ornament, and his mythical vestiary of mutant garments. Like Kawakubo, and, indeed, most of the participants in "Skin + Bones," he dismantled, ruptured, fractured, or fragmented, then reconfigured, not only clothing or buildings but the traditional logic behind them, which suddenly ceased to seem inevitable.

For anyone who can't get to Los Angeles between now and March, when the show closes, the catalogue, "Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture" (Thames & Hudson; $50) is worth the investment. Some graphic designers now call themselves "information architects," though Tracey Shiffman, who laid out the catalogue, isn't one of them. She deserves the title, however, if for nothing else than for giving such innovative thought to the ergonomics of reading. The text is set in parallel columns separated by a channel, where the footnotes and captions are printed in contrasting ink. It spares the eye tedious travel back and forth or up and down to fetch its references from a well. And the catalogue, like the show it documents, proposes a definition of shelter that includes a habitat for experiment where a family of ideas—unsimple and rivalrous, like all families—can dwell. ♦

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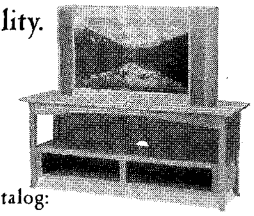

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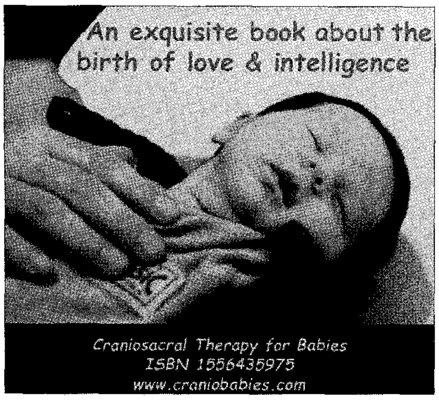

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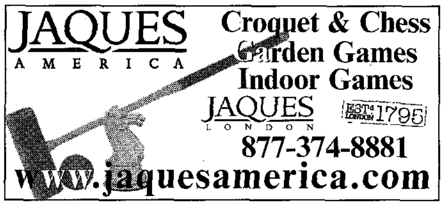

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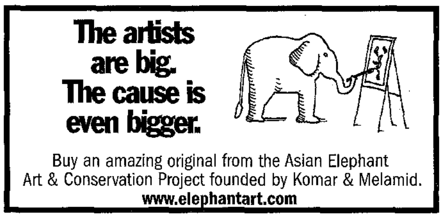

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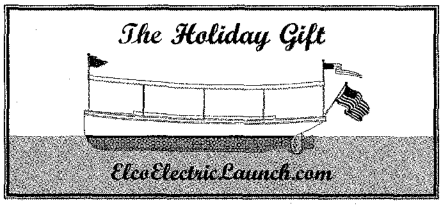

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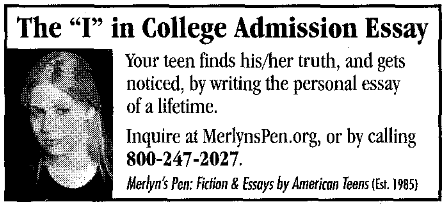

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POP MUSIC

STRING THEORY

The harpist Joanna Newsom's daring new album.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

The cover of Joanna Newsom's new album, "Ys," is an oil painting by the California artist Benjamin Vierling. Newsom is depicted with plaited blond hair, wearing a billowing blouse and a garland of flowers. She is seated at a window on a thronelike chair, holding a sickle in her right hand and a tiny gilt-framed painting of a moth in her left. A blackbird perches on the windowsill, a cherry in its beak; beyond lie valleys and hills. A press release issued by Newsom's record label, Drag City, says that Vierling "did the cover painting old-master style, with layers of egg-tempera and glazes. Strictly 16th-century processes, just like the recording of the album."

The Renaissance references may be a joke, but a careful, almost precious husbandry of the past is characteristic of Newsom's work. Newsom, who is twenty-four, is a classically trained harpist, and "Ys"—pronounced "eess"; it's the name of an island in Breton mythology—is a series of complex, through-composed songs that have more in common with Kurt Weill's long-form ballads than with contemporary pop music. Yet Newsom tends to perform in rock clubs, not concert halls, and many of her fans—including the novelist Dave Eggers, who praised her "bare and unflinching" music in *Spin*—are devotees of independent rock. Moreover, the songs on "Ys" feature lush, intricate orchestral arrangements by the pop composer Van Dyke Parks. (Parks, who was a child actor, worked on Rufus Wainwright's 1998 début record and on "Smile," the legendary album by the Beach Boys, which was begun in 1967 but not completed until 2004.)

Newsom is sometimes lumped with a group of acoustic musicians called "freak folk" or "free folk." They include the bands Tower Recordings and Feathers and the warbling singer and songwriter Devendra Banhart, with whom Newsom shares a fearlessness and a deceptively childlike air. In essence, however, folk describes simple songs that are universally accessible and performed on cheap instruments, if any. (Rap easily qualifies as folk music.) Newsom uses antique words that many English speakers won't recognize, and plays an expensive and heavy instrument that you couldn't bring on a camping trip, and some of her recent songs are almost as long as American sitcoms (average length: twenty-two minutes, without commercials).

In 2002, Will Oldham, an eccentric singer and songwriter known as Bonnie Prince Billy, heard recordings that Newsom had made herself, and brought her on tour. In 2003, Drag City released Newsom's first full-length album, "The Milk-Eyed Mender": twelve songs about "funny things," each one peppered with words like "grammerie" and "poetaster." It is odd and wonderful music, as cheerful and melodically sure-footed as it is affected and fey. Newsom plays the harp with the utilitarian clarity of a piano player in a band, vigorously plucking bass notes with her left hand while exploring chords in the upper register with her right. (Mercifully, she avoids the cascading glissandi that in movies signal "childhood memory" or "medication taking hold.") Her voice is an acquired taste: a wobbly mezzo-soprano that leaps into falsetto and breaks in a woody squeak. At first, she sounded to me like Lucille Ball reciting Edmund Spenser. She brought to mind a college student I knew who wore suspenders to show that she would not countenance this debased modern world.

I was won over by the strong arc of Newsom's melodies and the bristling energy of her language. Her lyrics sound as though they were meant to be read, not sung; that she sings them so nimbly does not necessarily mean that anyone else could. She has a passionate appreciation for the musicality of words and the glow of a well-ordered line: "And the gathering floozies afford to be choosy and all sneezing darkly in the dimming divide" (from "Peach, Plum, Pear"). The animals that populate her songs—canaries, tadpoles, worms, turkeys, toads, larks, and a variety of shellfish—are pretty funny. "Even mollusks have weddings," she sings on "Inflammatory Writ."

Most musicians like to begin an album with a song that is rousing and short. "Emily," which opens "Ys," is twelve minutes long and slow, and it changes time signatures at least a dozen times. The lyrics roughly concern Newsom's sister Emily, an astrophysicist, who sings background vocals. (Their distant cousin Gavin Newsom is the mayor of San Francisco.) Several minutes into the song, Newsom delivers a brief tutorial on celestial terminology: "The meteorite is the source of light, and the meteor's just what we see; and the meteoroid is a stone that's devoid of the fire that propelled it to thee." Maybe I'm partial to pedantry, but I find this charming. The words before and after this verse give the song emotional heft. Newsom sings, "I sat by your side, by the water. You taught me the names of the stars overhead," and, after a line or two about the Pleiades, she continues, "I promised you I'd set them to verse, so I'd always remember." The lesson about meteors, then, is a shared intimacy, a metaphor for the relationship between sisters—an insight you might miss on the first (or tenth) listen. "Ys" is built from many such subtle moments, and sometimes Parks's music—which ranges from small, darting passages to dense, movie-soundtrack swells—threatens to overwhelm the songs.

Newsom's songs feature antique English words. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Earlier this month, at a sold-out show at New York's Webster Hall, Newsom performed all of "Ys," along with songs from "The Milk-Eyed Mender" and a Scottish folk ballad. A small, trim woman with waist-length brown hair, she wore a white scoop-neck shirt, tight black jeans, and, yes, suspenders. She took the stage with just five musicians—an implausibly small number, given Parks's elaborate arrangements. But Newsom had reworked Parks's music, creating simpler parts for bouzouki, banjo, accordion, and drums. This allowed her voice to become more prominent—it has more grain and tone than the recordings suggest. It was clear that the imagery on "Ys" changes quickly and often; the compositions have a narrative momentum that justifies their length.

Without seeing Newsom's hands and feet, it is difficult to understand how hard she must work to pluck the strings and press the pedals while reciting by heart a small book's worth of verse. I haven't seen a performance of such sustained intensity all year. If Newsom recalls another musician, it is the singer and pianist Tori Amos, who shares her technical virtuosity, and who also seems to be immersed in a private world. The audience was silent during each song, waiting for the last note to fade away before erupting into extremely loud and loving applause. The crowd behaved as if it were at a classical concert, but it responded to Newsom as if she were a rock star. ♦

From the Bristol (R.I.) Phoenix.

Rhode Island Attorney General's Office spokesman said the case is "one of the most squirrelous I've heard about."

Nuts to that!

MUSICAL EVENTS

HOLD THE MOZART

New works by John Adams and György Kurtág in Vienna.

BY ALEX ROSS

When, in October of last year, John Adams unveiled "Doctor Atomic," his opera of nuclear hubris and fear, he might have been expected to take a week or two off, or, at least, a day. Instead, on the afternoon following the première, in San Francisco, he sat down with the director Peter Sellars to plot out a new piece. The two longtime collaborators looked over a volume of South Indian oral tales, as rendered in English by the folklorist A. K. Ramanujan, and chose one about a woman who transforms herself into a tree. "A Flowering Tree," the result of their labors, had its première earlier this month at the MuseumsQuartier, in Vienna. The score is opulent, dreamlike, fiercely lyrical, at times shadowy and strange—unlike anything that the fifty-nine-year-old composer has written.

Adams's prior theatre pieces have addressed tense modern subjects: Nixon's trip to China, the 1985 hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro, the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake, and, of course, the atom bomb. The sudden swerve into a fairy-tale realm came in response to a mammoth project that Sellars is currently undertaking in Vienna: a genre-spanning festival called New Crowned Hope, which is linked to the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Mozart's birth. The name is taken from Mozart's Masonic lodge, and the aim is to refract the composer's spirit—in particular, his recurrent themes of transformation and reconciliation—through a modern prism. By the time the festival ends, on December 13th, there will have been films from Chad, Indonesia, and Kurdish Iran; dance works from Congo, Cambodia, and Maori New Zealand; a concert by the Malian singer-songwriter Rokia Traoré; six concerts by the Kronos Quartet; a new opera-oratorio by the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho; and a bit of Mozart, choreographed by Mark Morris. In a mission statement, Sellars said, "Where Mozart ended is where we begin," inspiring snickers in the German-language press about American naïveté. In fact, Sellars has very craftily figured out how to obtain ten million euros from the Austrian government to commission work that he likes.

"A Flowering Tree," for its part, takes off from "The Magic Flute." In both operas, the love of a prince and a maiden endures after a long separation and painful trials. There is also a kinship with Richard Strauss's autumnal masterpiece "Daphne," based on the ancient Greek myth of arboreal metamorphosis. But, where Daphne's transformation is permanent, Kumudha, in the Indian tale, can move in and out of her tree shape when pitchers of water are poured on her body. The Prince falls in love with her and marries her. The trials begin when the Prince's sister exploits the magic for public show and neglectfully leaves Kumudha trapped in a grotesque hybrid state, whereupon she crawls away from her husband in shame. Only when the Prince recognizes her voice in a travelling band of minstrels is she restored to humanity.

Adams's opera "A Flowering Tree" has lyrical bursts worthy of Leonard Bernstein.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

In keeping with Sellars's cosmopolitan concept, other cultural layers were added to the Indian core. Adams, who crafted his own libretto from Ramanujan's text, wrote mostly in English, but he translated the choruses into Spanish, in recognition of the fact that the orchestra and the chorus performing at the première—the Joven Camerata and the Schola Cantorum—were from Venezuela. That country, whatever its political difficulties, possesses a remarkable music-education system, instructing hundreds of thousands of kids from poor areas; young players mixed with adults in the Camerata's ranks. There was also choreography for three Indonesian dancers. Adams, who conducted the première, was the only Anglo-Saxon male in the pit or on the stage.

"A Flowering Tree" could easily have turned into a sort of giddy multicultural jamboree. But Adams's score has its own agenda. The first sound that floats out of the orchestra is a chattering series of alternating thirds in the upper strings, which calls to mind not only the rustling of leaves but a passage in the second movement of Sibelius's Sixth Symphony. Adams often begins a new work with an allusion to an existing one, and his nod toward Sibelius's moody, enigmatic late style immediately puts the fairy tale in a different light. Of course, there are plenty of bewitching spells of rhythm and color: the marvellous Schola Cantorum singers are given swinging, syncopated choruses; the orchestra constantly shimmers and glows, with harp, celesta, exotic percussion, and two recorders adding hyperimpressionistic refinement; several surges of clean-lined melody are worthy of Leonard Bernstein. Yet behind it all is a brooding sensibility, which speaks through groping passages of recitative (often using the opaque whole-tone scale), pale string choirs, subterranean rumblings of brass, and sometimes gnashing dissonances.

Indeed, despite the happy ending, this little tale is actually quite dark: Kumudha's failed transformation evokes all the wrecked natural beauty that the march of human progress has left in its wake. The point is driven home in the opera's last minutes, when Kumudha's final transformation occurs. The orchestra delivers a climactic commentary that sounds simultaneously like a shout of joy and a cry for help. Sinuous triplet figures gradually accelerate through different sections of the orchestra and move upward in register as the chorus sustains the note B. That note then becomes the center of a blazing B-major triad, but the gestation of the chord is painful and protracted, with sharp semitone dissonances persisting right up to the final bar. The ghost of Sibelius hovers again: the master's Seventh Symphony ends with a sustained C-major chord through which a B burns for six slow beats. This is a hard-won triumph, from which not all shadows have been banished.

Sellars seems to have directed the show in a carefree mood: the stage pictures were crisp, and the action flowed with uncomplicated ease. Gabriel Berry outfitted both cast and orchestra in sumptuous Indian robes. George Tsypin created a handsome tree-branch-filled set, and James Ingalls diverted the eye with twinkling lights. Rusini Sidi, Eko Supriyanto, and Astri Kusama Wardani danced with slow, fluid, vital gestures. Of the singers, the charismatic bass Eric Owens had the most success at breathing life into the text, which, for all its charms, lacks the literary power of Alice Goodman's librettos for "Nixon in China" and "The Death of Klinghoffer," not to mention the poetic thunder of John Donne and Charles Baudelaire in "Doctor Atomic." As Kumudha, Jessica Rivera showed a secure, beautiful soprano voice, and Russell Thomas had moments of keen expression as the Prince. The Joven Camerata played with high passion throughout. Of many vibrant sounds, I was most haunted by a sadly singing trumpet solo reminiscent of Miles Davis in "Sketches of Spain."

Running concurrently in Vienna with New Crowned Hope is the Wien Modern festival, an annual series that honors the severe ideals of the postwar musical avant-garde. Here, to paraphrase the local style of new-music commentary, one finds no easy California dream of world harmony, no *Big-Mac-Ästhetik*, but, instead, unblinking encounters with the horror of modernity, a philosophy of resistance and negation, an adherence to the "aesthetic category of the new." (I actually saw that phrase in a dismissive review of Adams's opera.) Wien Modern's contribution to the Mozart year had a distinctly churlish air: just before I arrived, it presented a new opera by Bernhard Lang entitled "I Hate Mozart," about a "Magic Flute" staging gone awry.

The guest of honor, alongside Lang, was the great and mysterious Hungarian composer György Kurtág, who, at the age of eighty, is among the last survivors of the original avant-garde generation. He is a composer of neither/nor—neither ruthlessly new in his methods nor remotely traditional, neither atonal nor tonal. Every description of his work has to be qualified and qualified again: it is compressed but not dense, lyrical but not sweet, dark but not dismal, quiet but not calm. At first hearing, it suggests a cloistered, hermetic space, yet it is ventilated with many hidden influences, and has deep roots in the folk music of the Balkans. In truth, Kurtág could easily have been transplanted into Sellars's one-world aesthetic, just as the darker strains in Adams's opera could be assimilated into the "aesthetic category of the new," whatever that might be. Major composers wreck all categories as they move along.

I was able to see only one of several Kurtág events that Wien Modern presented at the Konzerthaus, but I chose wisely: it turned out to be one of those uncanny experiences that only European concert halls can provide, in which voices seem to whisper out of the walls. In the first half, the violinist Hiromi Kikuchi played, with phenomenal conviction, Kurtág's "Hipartita," an alternately fantastical and meditative eight-part soliloquy that was finished in 2004. Then, in the second half, Kurtág himself came onstage, in the company of his wife, Márta, to perform selections from "Játékok" ("Games"), his eight-volume collection of miniatures for two- and four-hand piano. The Kurtágs played on what was described as a "*piano con supersordino*"—an upright piano whose mute pedal has been permanently depressed. An amplification system devised by the composer's son, György Kurtág, Jr., allowed the instrument to resonate richly throughout the hall. You felt that you were eavesdropping on an intimate family affair: like some sweet old couple in a movie, the Kurtágs smiled at each other and allowed their bodies to sway with the music, apparently oblivious of the packed hall of new-music aficionados watching them.

But what playing! Notes were placed with surgical care; inner voices gleamed in crystalline patterns; elusive emotional states were painted with quick, light strokes. At the heart of the "Játékok" selections was "In Memoriam András Mihály," a gentle, halting funeral procession that ends with spread-out white-key chords; it is music that must have deep meaning for Kurtág, as he orchestrated and elaborated it in the final movement of his 1994 orchestral masterpiece "Stele." In his own rendition at the piano, it sounded like a choir of lost souls singing behind a wall of ice. No composer has more convincingly approximated the feeling of everything coming to an end. Still, the music played on, full of crying, laughing, and murmuring voices, like a music box that still makes sound after its parts have stopped moving. To close, the Kurtágs performed an arrangement of the opening movement of Bach's cantata "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit," which was—how else to put it?—one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

HIGH HOPES

"The Fountain" and "For Your Consideration."

BY ANTHONY LANE

According to the Book of Genesis, the Tree of Life was in the Garden of Eden. Darren Aronofsky's "The Fountain," an altogether more useful guide, gives precise directions. You go to the middle of Central America, align yourself with three particular stars, place a small dagger inside a carved-stone map, follow the direction in which it points, head down a writhing tunnel, fight off scores of infuriated Mayans, climb a few hundred steps, confront the sacred guardian, evade his flaming spear, nip through the doorway, and bingo: the Tree of Life. Whatever you do, don't lick the sap.

That is the one lesson that I took away from "The Fountain" with any confidence. The rest of the film is a gorgeous nimbus of confusion. Even the sacred guardian leaves you in a bind: he is openly murderous, yet he wears what appears to be a set of jewelled antlers, which must mean that he moonlights as one of Madonna's backup dancers. The intruder whom he tries to fend off is Tomás (Hugh Jackman), a sixteenth-century Spanish conquistador who has been dispatched by Queen Isabel (Rachel Weisz) to the jungles of what she calls New Spain, in search of cuttings from the Tree of Life. But wait. The sixteenth century is merely one layer of this triple-decker movie. Our two stars reappear in other guises, spread throughout the action: sometimes as Tommy and Izzi Creo, a present-day scientist and his dying wife, at other times—and I am flying blind here, despite having seen the film—as a future Tom and the same Izzi, or a ghost-white memory of her, floating through deep space. Inside a bubble. With a tree.

All of which suggests that, demographically speaking, "The Fountain" may reach a slightly different audience from the one that went to see "Jackass Number Two." For a start, Aronofsky is untroubled by the need for humor, his eye being on higher things. Not a streak of black comedy, for instance, discolors the movie as it proceeds with its meditation on death, and on the means by which it might be overcome. If my calculations are correct, the tree that Tomás tracked down five centuries ago has more recently yielded a chemical that turns out, in the course of Tommy's research, to possess anti-aging properties; it even seems to reverse malignant growths, although it has come too late to save Izzi, who has a brain tumor. "Death is a disease," Tommy says. "It's like any other. And there is a cure." Now, it is hard to think of a more timely and provocative subject. Given that many citizens in wealthy societies view senescence as an insult and illness as a temporary obstruction, and that some of them pay to have their own corpses frozen in anticipation of a long-range thaw, why shouldn't death itself be next on their hit list? On the other hand, who would wish to live forever if it meant being around for the release of "Jackass Number Ninety-one"?

There is every reason to suppose that immortality, if granted to humans, would be at best a drag and at worst a farce, both hideous and divisive. In "The Fountain," though, it is a buoyant reverie. The publicity material, which I read only after the screening, revealed that Jackman's later scenes take place in the twenty-sixth century, and that the bubble is in fact a type of frictionless spaceship. This was news to me. For all the information given by the film, he might as well be trapped inside the world's most beautiful beer commercial. The bubble drifts upward through swarms of fizzing gold—passing nebulae, presumably exploded into life by a shot of intergalactic Jim Beam. I am fond of Jackman, who is clearly a good sport, and the sight of a levelheaded Australian being forced to shave his head, assume the lotus position, and levitate slowly toward the infinite brought me not to a plane of higher serenity but to a low unease about the ribbing he can expect from his mates back home.

Rachel Weisz plays three roles in "The Fountain," including the Queen of Spain.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Darren Aronofsky, to judge from this movie and from his previous films "Pi" and "Requiem for a Dream," is a dark and dedicated soul. He is also engaged to Rachel Weisz, who has never looked more sumptuous than she does in her queenly closeups here, with the focus holding on her reddened lips and blurring as it reaches her earrings. The film is largely a matter of minute concentration—we get the textures of rough bark and porous skin—interrupted by large and lavish skyscapes. What fails to concern or attract Aronofsky is the place where most of us hang out—the in-between, the midshot of everyday existence. The movie may have significant truths to impart, although I have my doubts, but it feels too inexperienced, too unworldly, to have earned the right to them. When it premièred, at the Venice Film Festival, there were both raves and snorts; for all those viewers who found it preposterous, there were others who melted before this lushly imagined trip. Did it not occur to anyone that both sides could be right?

The latest film from Christopher Guest is called "For Your Consideration." It offers, for our vituperation, the hungry heart of everyone in the movie business who has ever dreamed of winning an Oscar—in short, everyone in the movie business. The story turns on a lachrymose production titled "Home for Purim," in which Marilyn Hack (Catherine O'Hara), an actress entering what may be her third flush of youth, plays a Jewish matriarch of the nineteen-forties. Opposite her is Victor Allan Miller (Harry Shearer), whose meatiest part to date has been that of "Irv, the foot-long wiener," in a series of TV commercials. Their daughter is played by Callie Webb (Parker Posey), a standup comedian with an imperceptible sense of humor. Soon enough, we get the idea: the only thing holding back the ambition of these folks is their talent, which is roughly half the size of Irv.

"For Your Consideration" is the new arrival in a distinguished line of Guest bonanzas: "A Mighty Wind," "Best in Show," "Waiting for Guffman," and—a moment's silence, please, while we bow our heads in reverence—"This Is Spinal Tap." (Rob Reiner was the director, but Guest co-wrote, starred, and was the presiding genius.) Like Preston Sturges, Guest keeps a stable of stock players, and the pleasure of his projects lies in waiting for the old faces to pop up again. This time, we get Bob Balaban and Michael McKean as a couple of easily wounded writers (not that any other kind exists), Eugene Levy as Victor's agent ("You're like a cold piece of toast," he tells his client), a frizzy Guest as the director of "Home for Purim," and John Michael Higgins, in resplendent form as the head of publicity on the set, spreading the good word with every tool of his trade. "Quick question," he says. "The Internet: that's the one with e-mail, yes?"

As that line suggests, Guest and Levy—who co-wrote the film—are painting the gags with unusually broad strokes, possibly using Levy's eyebrows for a brush. If the movie business were truly as hapless as this, nothing of any value would ever have slunk out of Hollywood, and it isn't long before "For Your Consideration" bumps into an intractable problem. You just can't conceive of a film as feeble and archaic as "Home for Purim"—even when transfigured, at the insistence of management, into "Home for Thanksgiving"—being backed by a local cable channel, let alone a major studio. The lowliest manufacturer of daytime soaps would wash his hands of it. In other words, Guest is rigging the evidence: deliberately cheapening his target so as to guarantee himself an easy shot. By his exorbitant standards, that itself counts as a cheap trick, and, indeed, the whole enterprise sways toward the obvious—my God, did you know that people in movies actually *want* to be successful?

One could argue that heavy metal, the art form unpeeled by "This Is Spinal Tap," was no less ripe for ridicule. What keeps that movie fresh, however, is the detailed nicety of its observations: show me a lead guitarist in distress at the backstage buffet because his slice of bologna does not fit the dimensions of its accompanying slice of bread and you have taught me all I shall ever need to know about the life of a touring band. The scraps of perfection in "For Your Consideration" are harder to pick out; the parody of "Entertainment Tonight," say, with Fred Willard and Jane Lynch as the hosts from Hell, struck me as too brash and raucous to do much damage. There are compensations—the genial panic on Lynch's face when she's *not* addressing the camera, and the hair on Willard's head, which seems to have been harvested and furiously threshed—but the trouble is that "Entertainment Tonight" is already so close to self-parody that it requires no further assistance.

In order to stay ahead as a mocker these days, you must nail your subject for good. That is what I loved about Vince Vaughn and Ben Stiller in "Dodgeball": thanks to their efforts, I need never—can never—watch another sports movie with a straight face. No more following your dreams, no more coming back from the brink, and, best of all, no more being the best. And so it was with "Spinal Tap," which not only assaulted the rock documentary and left it for dead but practically killed heavy metal as a musical species. (Not that hard-core metal heads would notice. They can't hear you anyway.) By that reckoning, "For Your Consideration" feels weirdly meek and mild, an unmighty wind that quickly blows itself out. We never even get to Oscar night. A pity: I longed to see Guest, Levy, and the gang let loose on the speeches, the dance numbers, the seething losers, and the involuntary sobs. Wouldn't you pay to watch Parker Posey doing a Sally Field? ♦

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Volume LXXXII, No. 40, December 4, 2006. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: Jan. 23 & 30, Feb. 13 & 20, July 10 & 17, Aug. 7 & 14, Dec. 25 & Jan. 1) by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Melissa McCarthy Strome, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing & strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president–human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president–chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president–strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president–real estate; Maurie Perl, senior vice-president–chief communications officer. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: Steven T. Florio, Advance Magazine Group vice chairman; David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president–general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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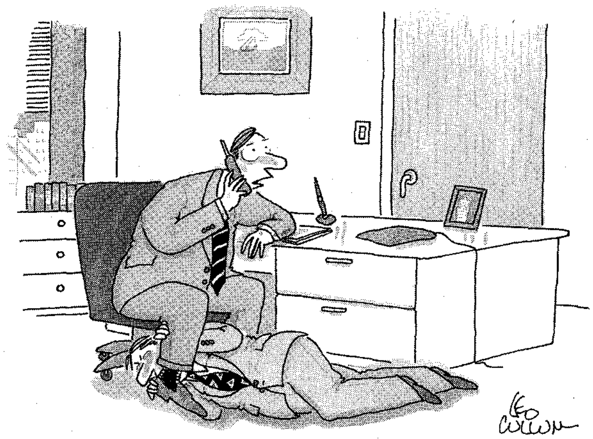
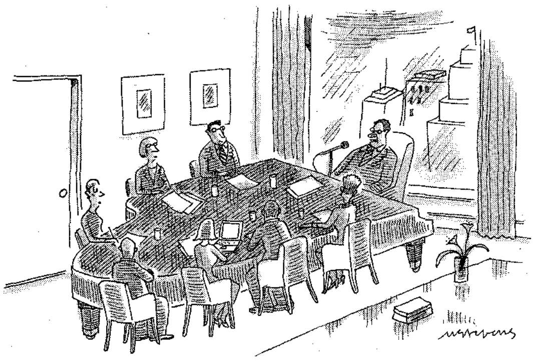
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Harry Bliss, must be received by Sunday, December 3rd. Finalists in the November 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 18th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Carol, let's go ahead and keep the job posted for a little while longer."
Colin Nissan, Brooklyn, N.Y.



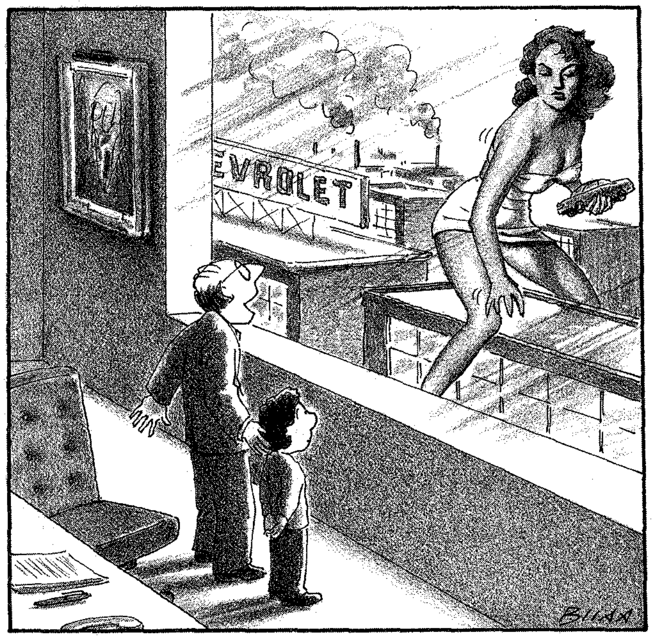
THE FINALISTS

"And all because of the account that got awa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ay . . ."
Jayadev Browne, New York City

"Hmm. What rhymes with layoffs?"
Carl Gable, Norcross, Ga.

"Some of you may be aware that I have been taking piano lessons."
Susan Shriver, New York City

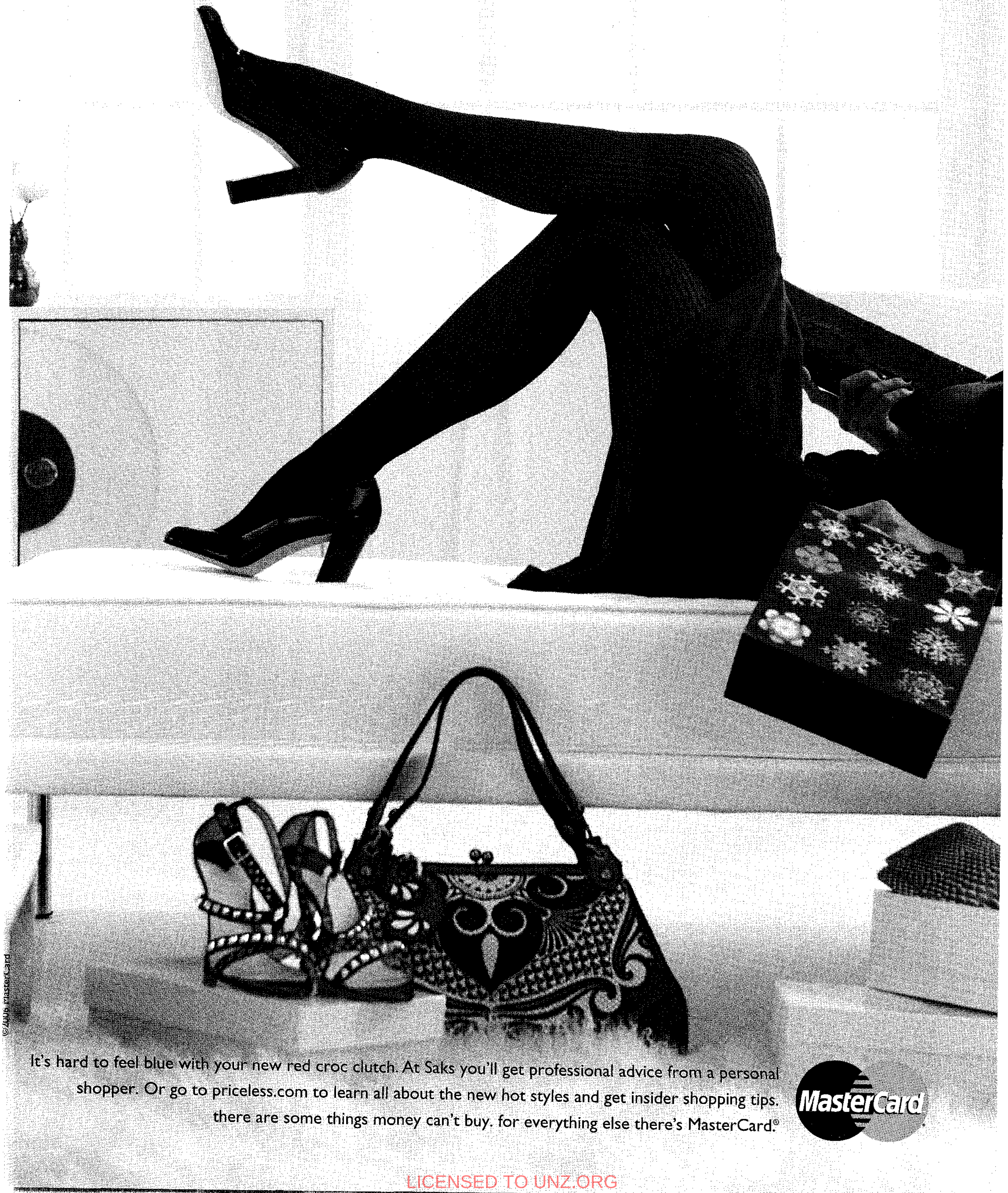
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

a whole new you put together by a
Saks personal shopper: $3,800

(another great session with your retail therapist: priceless)



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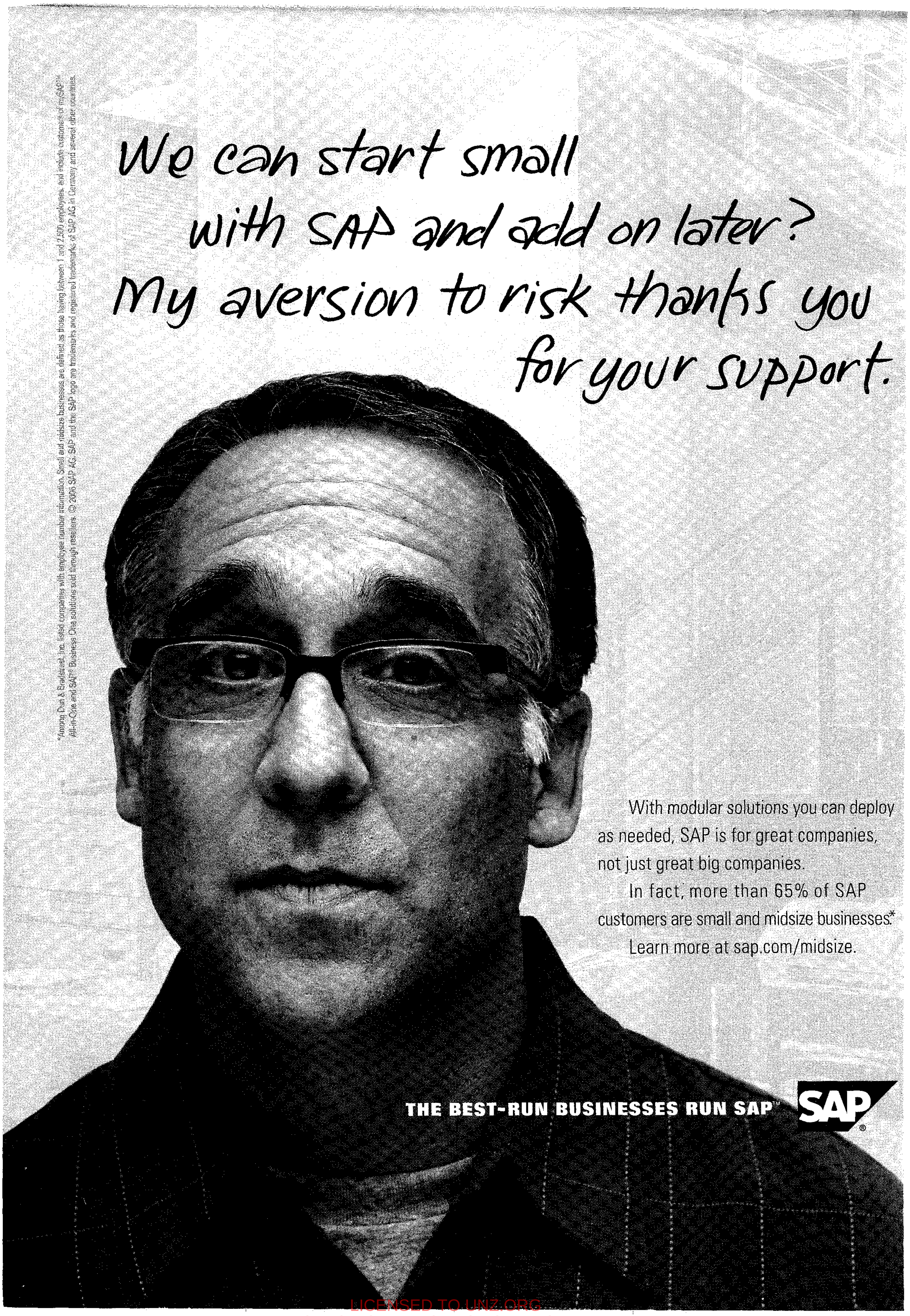
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